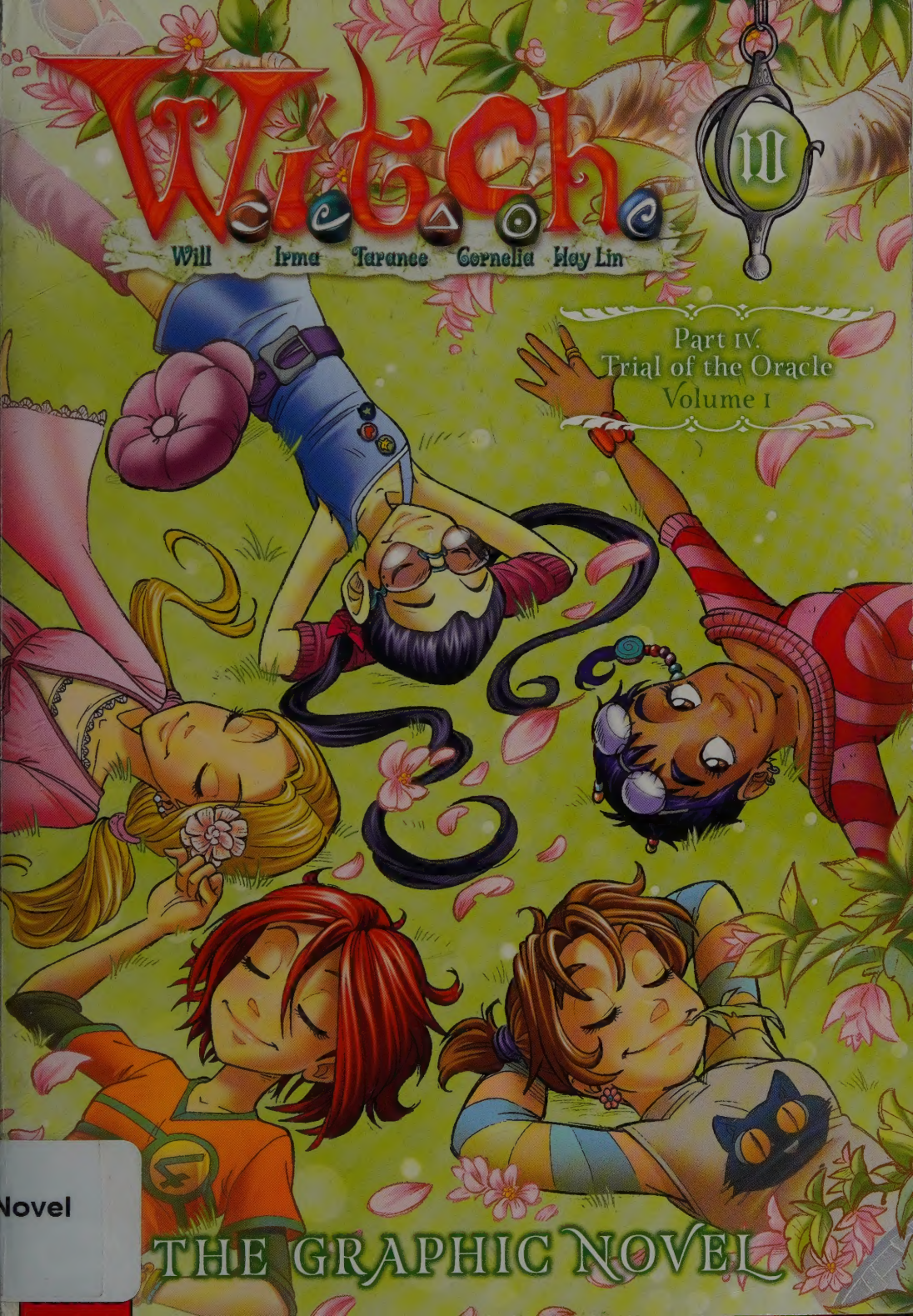
Witch
II
Will Irma Taranee Cornelia Hay Lin
Part IV.
Trial of the Oracle
Volume 1
THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Novel

W.i.t.c.h.
Will Irma Taranee Cornelia Hay Lin
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Trial of the Oracle
Volume 1

W.i.t.c.h

Will Irma Taranee Cornelia Hay Lin

Part IV.
Trial of the Oracle
Volume 1

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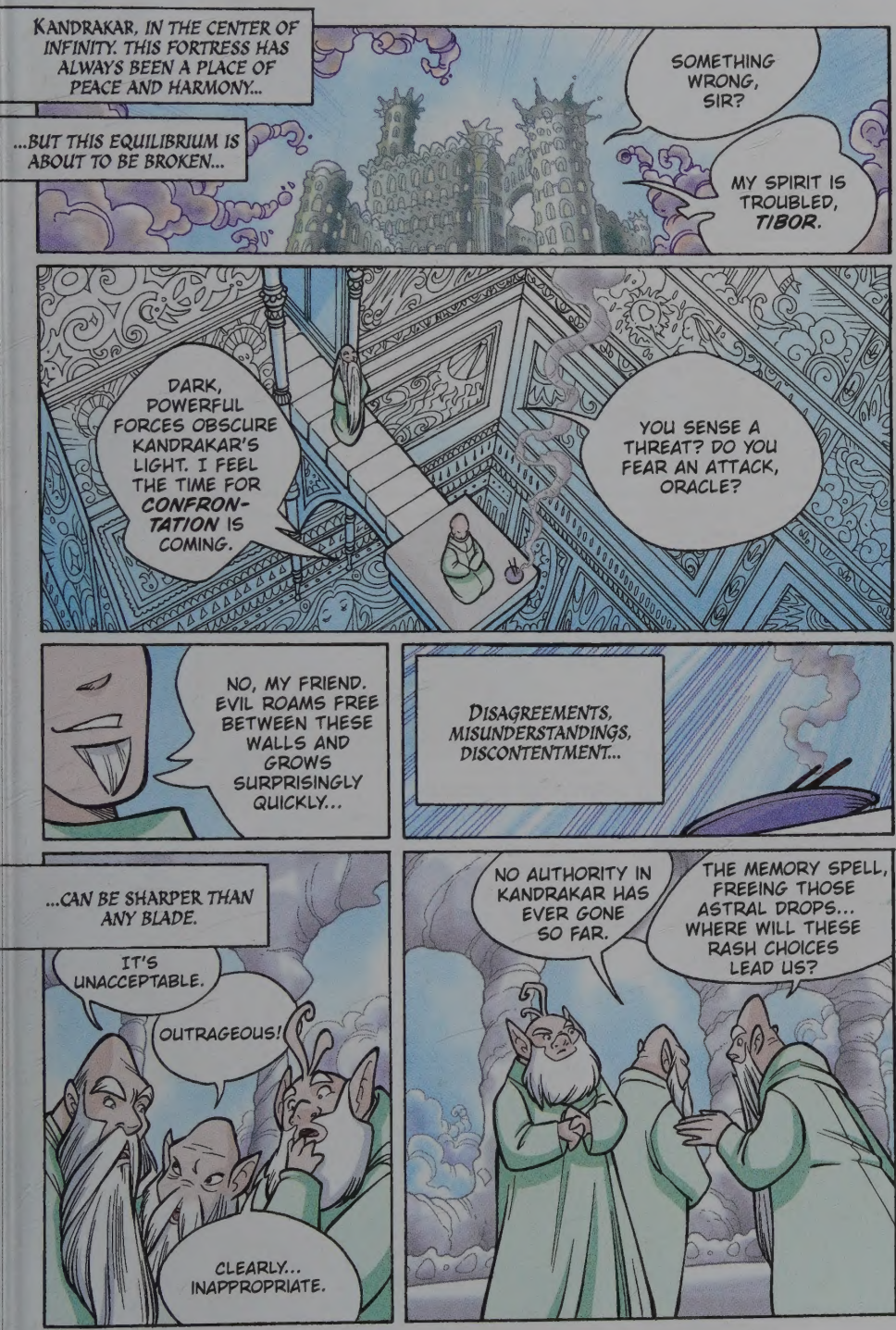
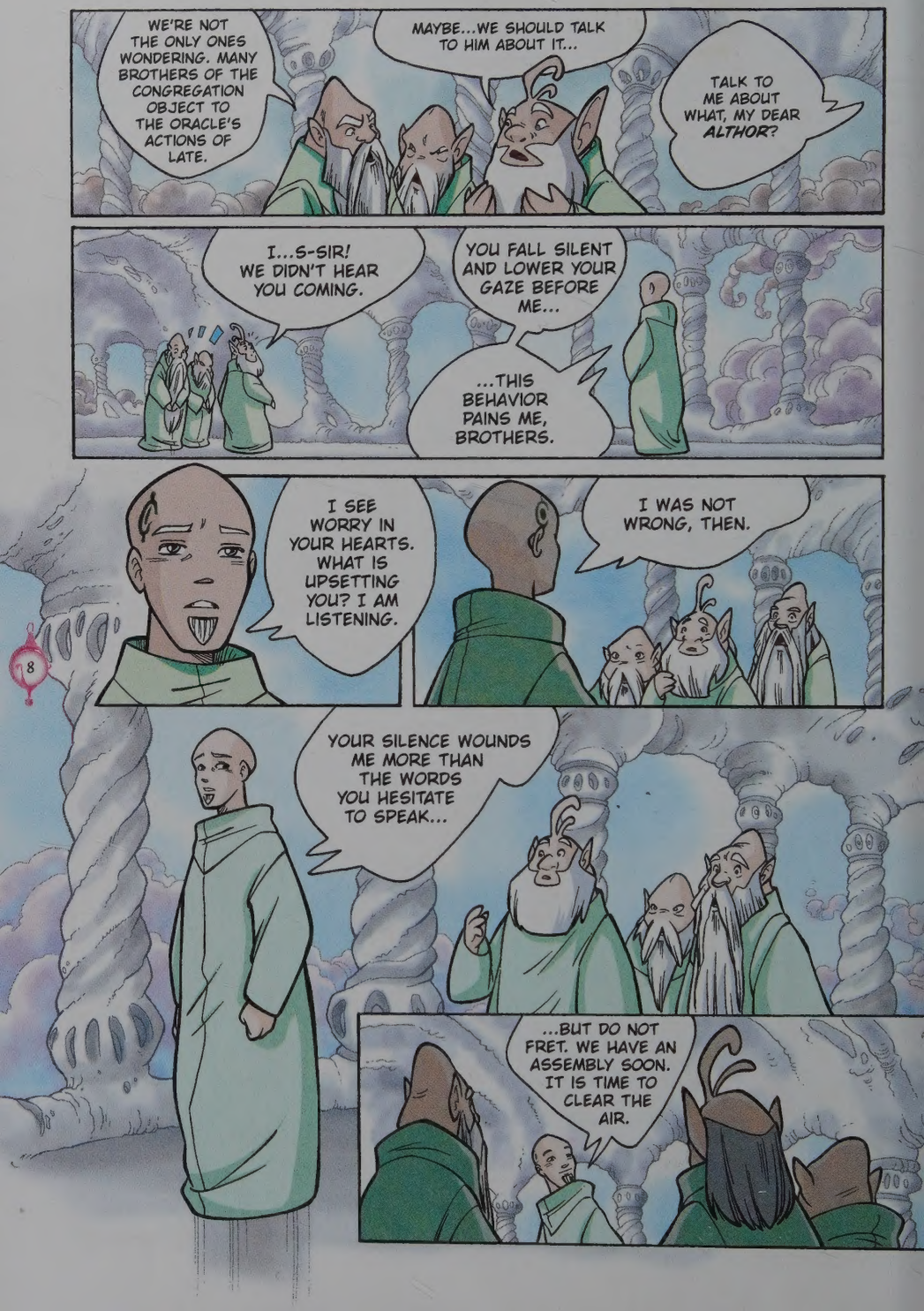
The Dispute

"Time's up, Oracle. The Congregation demands facts!"

Witch
Will
Irma
Taranee
Cornelia
Hay Lin

Ribbit, ribbit! It's HALF PAST SEVEN!
CRIPES! IT'S SUPER-LATE! WHY DIDN'T YOU RING EARLIER?
Actually... I did! This is the THIRD TIME...
WHAT'S WORSE IS I HAVE A TEST IN FIRST PERIOD!
Good morning, Miss Will! Your mom left a note. She has an important meeting this afternoon and...
Ciao, tesoro! Mamy
DON'T TELL ME...I WAS SOUND ASLEEP, HUH? I JUST OPENED MY EYES, AND I'M ALREADY TIRED!
SOME DAYS YOU GET OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT...
GOT IT...=GLUB= NO IDEA WHAT TIME SHE'LL BE BACK TONIGHT.
EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE GOING WRONG...
OOF! TODAY'S NOT MY DAY!
WISSSH
...AND ANYTHING COULD BE THE FINAL DROP THAT MAKES EVERYTHING OVERFLOW.

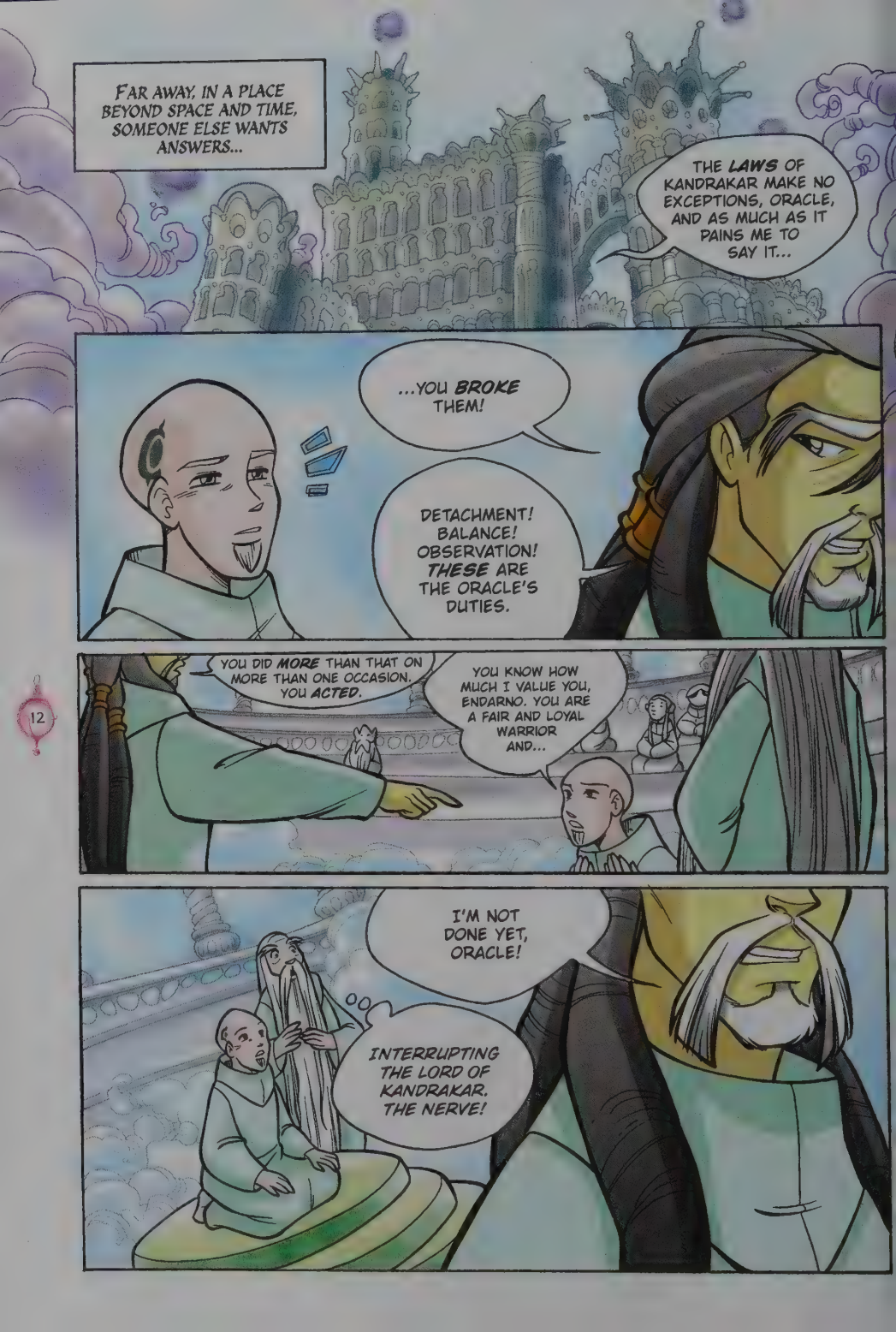

KANDRAKAR, IN THE CENTER OF INFINITY. THIS FORTRESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PLACE OF PEACE AND HARMONY...
...BUT THIS EQUILIBRIUM IS ABOUT TO BE BROKEN...
SOMETHING WRONG, SIR?
MY SPIRIT IS TROUBLED, TIBOR.
DARK, POWERFUL FORCES OBSCURE KANDRAKAR'S LIGHT. I FEEL THE TIME FOR CONFRONTATION IS COMING.
YOU SENSE A THREAT? DO YOU FEAR AN ATTACK, ORACLE?
NO, MY FRIEND. EVIL ROAMS FREE BETWEEN THESE WALLS AND GROWS SURPRISINGLY QUICKLY...
DISAGREEMENTS, MISUNDERSTANDINGS, DISCONTENTMENT...
...CAN BE SHARPER THAN ANY BLADE.
IT'S UNACCEPTABLE.
OUTRAGEOUS!
CLEARLY... INAPPROPRIATE.
NO AUTHORITY IN KANDRAKAR HAS EVER GONE SO FAR.
THE MEMORY SPELL, FREEING THOSE ASTRAL DROPS... WHERE WILL THESE RASH CHOICES LEAD US?


WE'RE NOT THE ONLY ONES WONDERING. MANY BROTHERS OF THE CONGREGATION OBJECT TO THE ORACLE'S ACTIONS OF LATE.
MAYBE...WE SHOULD TALK TO HIM ABOUT IT...
TALK TO ME ABOUT WHAT, MY DEAR ALTHOR?
I...S-SIR! WE DIDN'T HEAR YOU COMING.
YOU FALL SILENT AND LOWER YOUR GAZE BEFORE ME...
...THIS BEHAVIOR PAINS ME, BROTHERS.
I SEE WORRY IN YOUR HEARTS. WHAT IS UPSETTING YOU? I AM LISTENING.
I WAS NOT WRONG, THEN.
YOUR SILENCE WOUNDS ME MORE THAN THE WORDS YOU HESITATE TO SPEAK...
...BUT DO NOT FRET. WE HAVE AN ASSEMBLY SOON. IT IS TIME TO CLEAR THE AIR.

"MAYBE WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE WHOLE CONGREGATION, YOU WILL FIND THE COURAGE TO EXPRESS YOURSELVES FREELY."
I WANT YOU TO FEEL FREE TO SPEAK YOUR MINDS. KANDRAKAR'S HARMONY WAS BUILT ON AMITY...
...AND THIS REQUIRES THE UNIQUE, IRREPLACEABLE CONTRIBUTION OF EACH OF YOU.
I AM HERE TO PEACEFULLY OFFER MYSELF UP TO YOUR JUDGMENT, BROTHERS.
IF EVEN ONE OF YOU HAS ANY OBJECTIONS TO MY INTERVENTIONS...
...STEP FORTH WITHOUT FEAR. DIALOGUE IS THE ONLY PATH TO ANY SOLUTION.
WELL SAID, ORACLE. YOUR INTERVENTIONS... THEY'RE THE PROBLEM!
SHOULDN'T KANDRAKAR'S HIGHEST AUTHORITY MERELY OBSERVE AND KEEP THE BALANCE?
Isn't that the custodian of the TOWER OF MISTS?
YOUR OPINION IS VALUABLE, ENDARNO, MY FRIEND.
SPEAK, THEN. I AM LISTENING.

I'M LISTENING, WILL. WHAT WERE YOU SAYING?
=YAWN= THAT I'M DONE FOR, CORNELIA. LIKE AFTER SIXTY LENGTHS OF THE POOL.
YOU'RE TELLING ME. I ALMOST FELL ASLEEP OVER MY BOOKS.
UM... YEAH, YOU DON'T LOOK TOO AWAKE EITHER THIS MORNING!
AT LEAST I CAN GET DRESSED! YOUR LABEL'S SHOWING!
WHAT?
GUYS!
HEY, I SEE YOU'RE IN GREAT SHAPE!
SPARE US, IRMA. NOW IS NOT THE TIME.
YEAH... MATH TEST INCOMING!
OH! OH! NOW I GET WHY THE LONG FACES...
YOU WERE IMITATING HORSEBERG, HUH?
I SEE YOU'VE TAKEN UP ACTING, MISS LAIR?

IF THAT'S THE CASE, I HOPE YOU KNOW ALL OF EUCLID'S THEOREMS BY HEART TOO!
ORMMMNNG
UM, I...
YOU'RE LUCKY. I'VE GOT AN URGENT APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR FRIENDS. BUT YOU CAN'T ESCAPE, MISSY!
IT'S GONNA SUCK...
YOU'RE TELLING ME...
WILL!
MATT!
SEE YA LATER, OKAY?
THE NERVE! HE CALLS ME JUST TO LOOK FOR ORUBE... THEN ACTS LIKE NOTHING HAPPENED!*
*W.I.T.C.H. CHAPTER 36
SBAM
SHE DIDN'T EVEN SAY HI! WHAT'S GOING ON?


FAR AWAY, IN A PLACE BEYOND SPACE AND TIME, SOMEONE ELSE WANTS ANSWERS...
THE LAWS OF KANDRAKAR MAKE NO EXCEPTIONS, ORACLE, AND AS MUCH AS IT PAINS ME TO SAY IT...
...YOU BROKE THEM!
DETACHMENT! BALANCE! OBSERVATION! THESE ARE THE ORACLE'S DUTIES.
YOU DID MORE THAN THAT ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION. YOU ACTED.
YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I VALUE YOU, ENDARNO. YOU ARE A FAIR AND LOYAL WARRIOR AND...
I'M NOT DONE YET, ORACLE!
INTERRUPTING THE LORD OF KANDRAKAR. THE NERVE!

I'M NOT HERE TO ACCUSE A BROTHER BUT TO DEFEND THE RULES WHICH HAVE ALWAYS GOVERNED THIS PLACE OF SERENITY...
...AND I SPEAK FOR MANY OF US WHO FIND YOUR CHOICES INAPPROPRIATE FOR YOUR ROLE.
WHAT YOU SAY WEIGHS ON MY SOUL LIKE A STONE, ENDARNO. I AM READY TO TALK...
THE TIME FOR WORDS IS OVER, ORACLE. THE CONGREGATION DEMANDS FACTS!
THEN MAKE YOUR REQUEST. DO NOT HESITATE FURTHER.
IT'S VERY SIMPLE, SIR. AS STATED BY THE LAWS OF KANDRAKAR IN EXTREME CASES LIKE THIS, I THINK IT IS TIME...
...FOR THE CHALLENGE!
THE CHALLENGE!

AN ANCIENT, DEFINITIVE PROCEEDING THAT NO ONE HAS DARED INVOKE BEFORE NOW.
AN ACCUSER PUBLICLY CHALLENGES THE LORD OF THE FORTRESS TO DEFEND HIMSELF BEFORE THE CONGREGATION, WHICH HAS THE FINAL SAY...
...OR SUBMIT HIMSELF TO THE TRIAL, THUS DECLARING HIMSELF READY TO LOSE HIS POSITION AND HIS CREDIBILITY.
THE ORACLE HAS TWO CHOICES—ASSERT HIS AUTHORITY TO AVOID THE CHALLENGE...
...OR BE PREPARED TO LOSE!

SO BE IT, ENDARNO. IF THAT IS THE WILL OF THE CONGREGATION, I ACCEPT YOUR CHALLENGE.
I CANNOT GOVERN WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF EVERY BROTHER... BUT WILL DEFEND CHOICES I BELIEVED JUST!
I ADMIRE YOUR COURAGE AND WISH YOU THE BEST IN THIS TRIAL...BECAUSE FOR THE GOOD OF THE FORTRESS, KNOW I ONLY HAVE ONE WISH...
...TO PROVE YOU'RE NO LONGER WORTHY OF THE ROLE OF LORD OF KANDRAKAR.
15
AND IT WON'T BE MY WORDS THAT CONVINCE THE CONGREGATION, BUT MY WITNESSES'...
...YOUR CHOSEN ONES, ORACLE.

"THE FIVE YOUNG GUARDIANS."
HEY, LOOK WHO'S THERE!
ORUBE? ER... REBECCA?
THIS IS BECOMING A HABIT.
SHOULDN'T SHE BE AT THE SHOP?
GREAT! WHAT A NICE SURPRISE, SWEETIE!
How enthusiastic! Did I miss something?
Must be the EFFECT of Horseberg's test. She's in shock!
HEY, GUYS! WHADDAYA SAY WE TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NICE WEATHER TO DO SOMETHING TOGETHER?
SORRY, WILL, BUT...
...I WAS THINKING OF SEEING NIGEL, SINCE THINGS ARE BETTER BETWEEN US.
I GOTTA TAKE NAPOLEON TO GET A SHOT...
...AND I SHOULD CATCH UP ON STUDYING HISTORY. ORAL TESTS WITH COLLINS TOMORROW.
UM, I WROTE DOWN SOMETHING I HAD TO DO TOO...

OH YEAH! I FOUND SOME AWESOME FABRIC IN THE ATTIC TO MAKE A SKIRT AND...
PAT
YOU'RE GOING OUT WITH ERIC, HUH? IT'S WRITTEN ON YOUR FOREHEAD!
WHAT ABOUT YOU, IRMA?
DON'T COUNT ON ME. I'VE GOT AN AFTERNOON OF FORCED LABOR WAITING.
IF I DON'T TIDY UP MY ROOM, MY DAD'S THREATENING TO TAKE MY STEREO INTO CUSTODY...
LOOKS LIKE IT'S JUST THE TWO OF US, THEN!
YEAH...
POPOOT
17
HEY, SIS! HOP IN. I'LL DRIVE YOU HOME!
PETER!

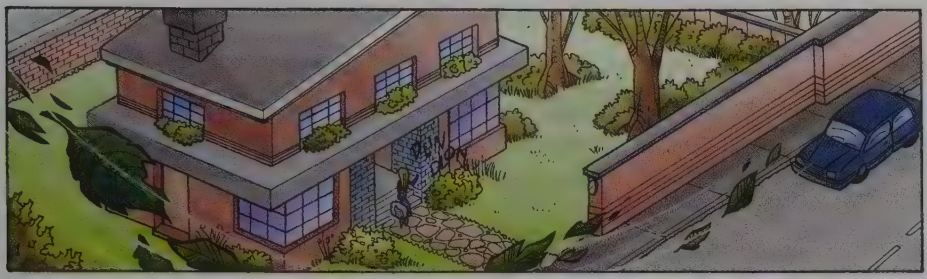
GIRLS, ANYONE NEED A LIFT?
UM... ACTUALLY...
"...WHY NOT?"
GARDEN PLAZA! HERE WE ARE, MISS HALE!
DON'T MIND HIM, CORNELIA. PETER'S GOT CAUGHT UP IN HIS ROLE AS CHAUFFEUR! HEY, YOU OKAY? YOU LOOK WEIRD...
I...I'M GREAT! THANKS FOR THE LIFT!
SEE YOU TOMORROW!
"HERE WE ARE, MISS HALE!"
HE'S REALLY CUTE!
CRIPES! WHAT WAS I THINKING?

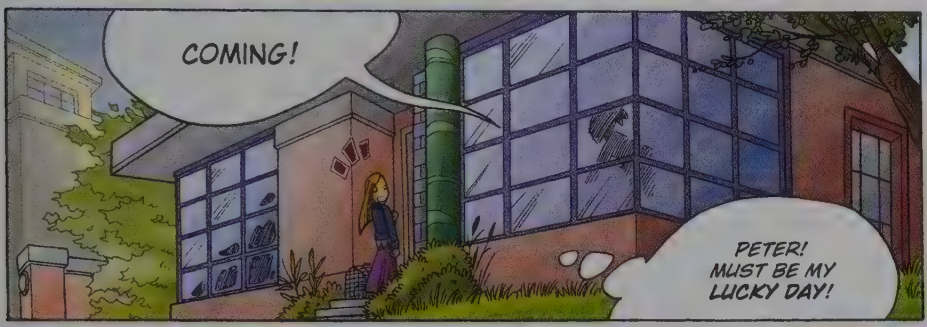
"MY BOOK! I LEFT IT ON THE BACK SEAT!"
17,40
HAVE I EVER TOLD YOU ABOUT ROSEVILLE? IT'S A SPECIAL PLACE NEAR HEATHERFIELD. ME AND MOM GO ON SUNDAYS SOMETIMES, BUT YOU CAN GET THERE BY BUS...YOU TAKE NO. 6 WHICH STOPS OUTSIDE THE POOL...OR IS IT 9? I GOTTA CHECK WHEN I GET HOME...
WILL...
OH, SPEAKING OF HOME...WHADDAYA SAY IF ONE OF THESE DAYS WE MEET UP AT YOUR PLACE AND CHANGE IT UP A BIT? MAYBE YOU DON'T MIND HOW IT IS NOW, BUT WITH A BIT MORE COLOR, IT WOULD LOOK TOTALLY DIFFERENT...
WILL...
...I BET HAY LIN HAS A TON OF IDEAS FOR THE WALLS. I COULD GIVE YOU SOME POSTERS IF YOU WANT. YOU SHOULDN'T LET IRMA DO IT UNLESS YOU WANT KARMILLA'S FACE EVERYWHERE, AND...
WILL... PLEASE...
...WOULD YOU SHUT UP A MINUTE?
HUH?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?

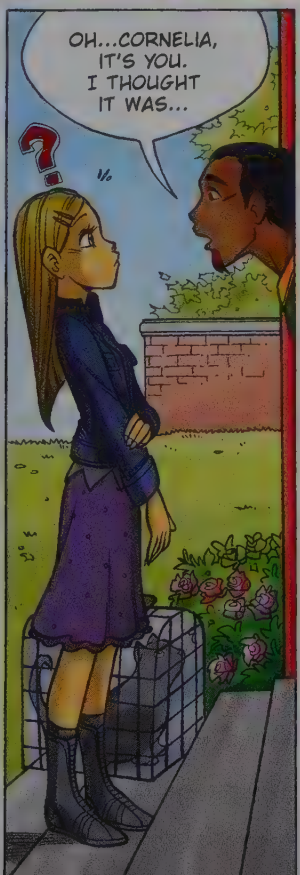
YOU CALL ME AT THE SHOP TO TELL ME TO MEET UP OUTSIDE YOUR SCHOOL...YOU SOUNDED WORRIED! I THOUGHT SOMETHING HAPPENED!
WHEN I GET THERE, YOU ACT LIKE YOU DIDN'T KNOW I WAS COMING, AND NOW...WHAT IS THIS?
IT'S JUST THAT...
...I CAN'T STAND SEEING YOU WITH MATT ANYMORE...
...I THOUGHT WE COULD ALL SPEND SOME TIME TOGETHER. WE'VE BEEN SO BUSY WITH THE ASTRAL DROPS LATELY...
TUNK
...AND WE'VE ENDED UP NEGLECTING OUR FRIENDSHIP!
OKAY, BUT I HAVE A JOB... AND I HAD TO MAKE UP AN EXCUSE TO TAKE THE AFTER-NOON OFF!
NOW, SORRY, BUT I REALLY GOTTA GO.
WAIT!
"I'LL WALK YOU, OKAY?"
CAFFE'

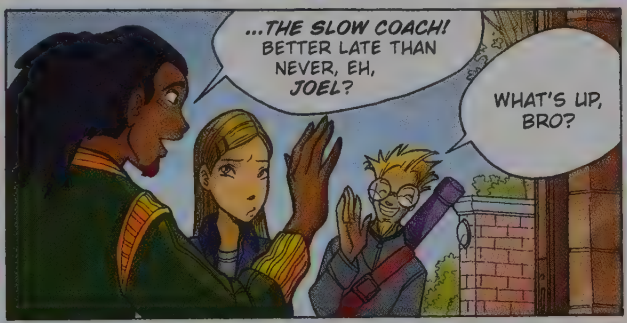
DLING DLENG DLING
HI, I'M BACK!
HI, BABY! LIKE THE NEW WIND CHIMES?
THEY SOUND LOVELY, PAPA...
DLING DLENG
REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING...
I FOUND THEM IN A DRAWER. THEY WERE A PRESENT FROM GRANDMA, YOU KNOW?
I S-SEE...
YOU SEE... WHAT? WHAT PLANET IS MY LITTLE ALIEN ON?
OOPS... I THINK I WAS DAYDREAMING!
SOUNDS TELL ME THE STORIES OF THINGS. JUST LIKE THE MUSIC BOX AT MS. RUDOLPH'S HOUSE AND THE TOKEN AT THE AMUSEMENT PARK.*
*AS SEEN IN W.I.T.C.H. CHAPTERS 4 AND 11

DLING DLING DLING
CAN YOU GET THE DOOR, HONEY? MY HANDS ARE FULL.
HUH? SURE...
DLING DLING DLING DLIIINGGG...
HOW ODD. THE DOOR'S OPEN, BUT NO ONE'S HERE...
MAYBE IT WAS THE *WIND*...
BUT... I CAN HEAR *GRANDMA'S* VOICE...
...*THE AIR* IS CARRYING IT TO ME!
WOOSH




COMING!
PETER! MUST BE MY LUCKY DAY!


OH...CORNELIA, IT'S YOU. I THOUGHT IT WAS...
?


...THE SLOW COACH! BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, EH, JOEL?
WHAT'S UP, BRO?

LEMME GUESS. AN ELEPHANT ON A SURFBOARD CUT YOU UP?
QUIT NAGGING, COOK! DIDN'T LOOK LIKE YOU WERE HAVING A BAD TIME!
MEOW...
YEAH... WHAT A WARM WELCOME, HUH?

IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, THERE'S A BLOND AT YOUR DOOR!
WHO, HER? SHE'S MY SISTER'S FRIEND.
CORNELIA!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING THERE? COME IN!
HEY, NAPOLEON! HI, KITTY, KITTY!
I... I HAVE TO TAKE HIM TO MR. OLSEN FOR HIS SHOT, REMEMBER?
MEOW!
EVERYTHING OKAY?
WONDERFUL!
"MY SISTER'S FRIEND!" SO THAT'S ALL I AM TO HIM!
WHAT AN IDIOT. WHAT DID I EXPECT?
I GUESS YOU CAME FOR THE BOOK...
CORNELIA! STILL ON PLANET EARTH?
HISTORY
HUH? YES...THANK YOU, TARANEE.

THERE'S SOMETHING YOU'RE NOT TELLING ME. IF I DIDN'T HAVE A DATE WITH NIGEL, I'D MAKE YOU SPILL THE BEANS AND...
BEEP BEEP BEEP
"HELLO?"
TOTAL EMERGENCY! I don't have much time, and the phone's under surveillance.
HI, IRMA. GOOD TO HEAR FROM YOU TOO.
No jokes, TARA! HAY-HAY just called me...
She got a message from her grandma... Looks like something big's going on in Kandrakar.
In Kandrakar? What?
KNOK KNOK
Um... Gotta go! EMERGENCY MEETING at the park in half an hour!

CLUNK
THAT ORACLE! NAGGING IS HIS FAVORITE HOBBY, HUH?
CLUNK
HIM AND HIS ANNOYING SMIRK! NEXT TIME I SEE HIM, HE WON'T HAVE MUCH TO SMILE ABOUT!
WH-WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
NIGEL WILL HAVE TO WAIT. WE HAVE ANOTHER APPOINTMENT, CORNELIA...
"...AND WE'D BETTER TELL WILL TOO."
THE ORACLE'S ON TRIAL?
YEAH...WELL, SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
SOUNDS LIKE SOME OF THE CONGREGATION ARE UPSET ABOUT STUFF HE'S DONE...
I'M SHOCKED!

HOW MANY TIMES DID WE TRY TO MAKE HIM SEE WE DIDN'T LIKE HIM INTERFERING IN OUR LIVES?
YOU WERE DEFINITELY THE BRAVEST AND MOST HONEST.
AND I'LL STAY THAT WAY, WILL. THE ORACLE MUST UNDERSTAND WE'RE NOT HIS PUPPETS. TIME TO STOP WITH THE ORDERS AND DECISIONS WITH NO EXPLANATIONS.
I THOUGHT I'D BEEN CLEAR, BUT LOOKS LIKE IT WASN'T ENOUGH. NOW I'M SICK OF IT... YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW FURIOUS I AM!
EVEN THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY IN KANDRAKAR CAN'T AFFORD TO PLAY WITH FIRE!
UM... GUYS...

I'M NOT TRYING TO DOUSE THE FLAMES, BUT... THERE'S SOMETHING I DON'T GET...
ME EITHER.
WHAT'S THE TRIAL IN KANDRAKAR GOT TO DO WITH US? THERE HAS TO BE A REASON HAY LIN'S GRANDMA WARNED US, RIGHT?
WELL...WE MIGHT BE CALLED TO TESTIFY.
TESTIFY? WOW! LIKE IN THE MOVIES! I CAN ALREADY PICTURE IT...
MISS LAIR, DO YOU KNOW THIS FINELY COIFFED DEFENDANT?
OH, PLEASE. YOU SOUND LIKE MY MOTHER.
HEY, YOU COULD ASK HER FOR TIPS! WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER TO SOME QUESTION?
RELAX, IRMA. IT'S NOT A QUIZ.

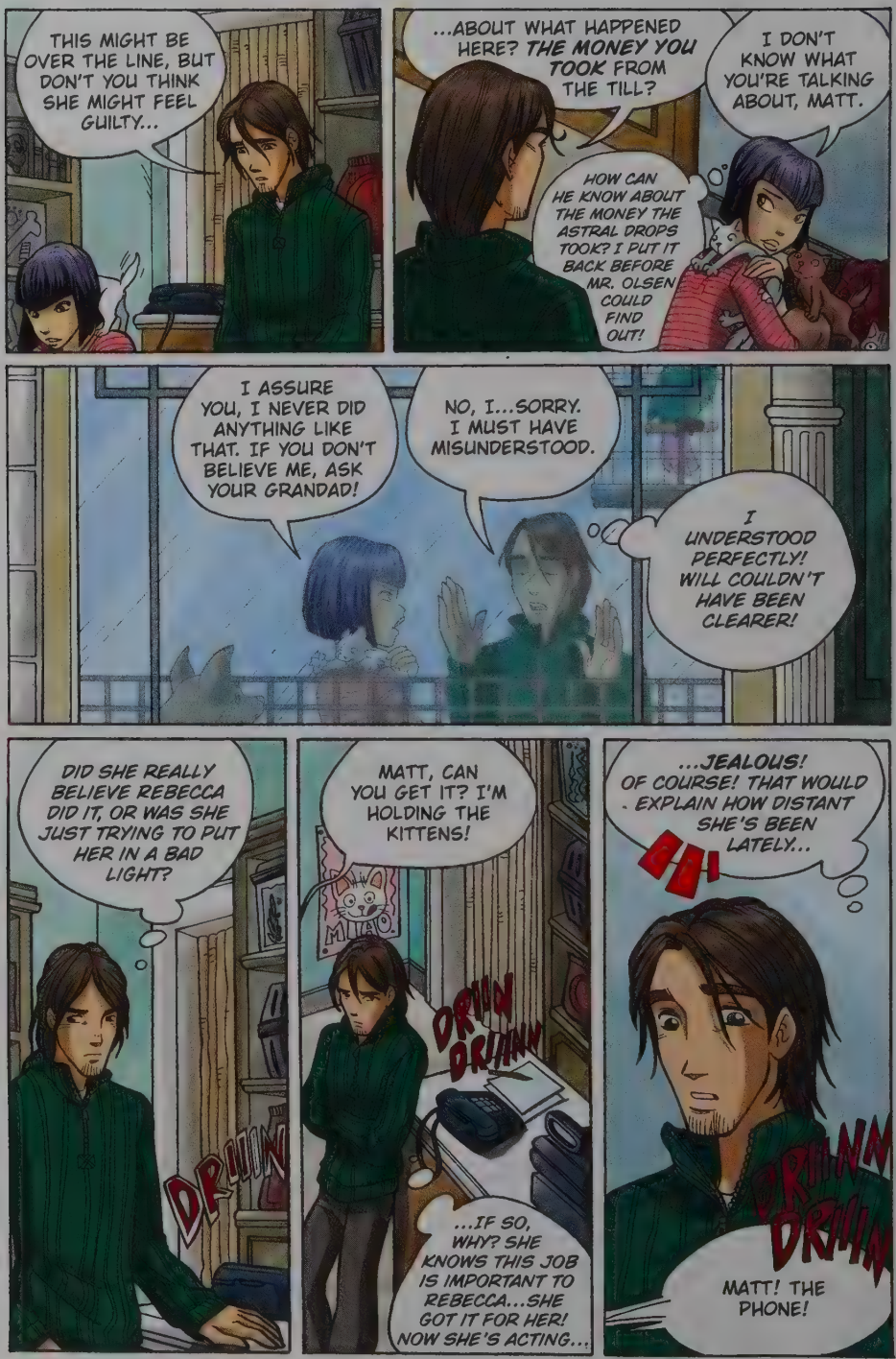
WE'LL JUST BE ASKED TO BE OURSELVES AND SAY WHAT WE FEEL LIKE SAYING. GRANDMA GAVE HER WORD.
MAYBE...BUT IT'S A HUGE RESPONSIBILITY, HAY LIN, AND I CAN'T HELP BUT WORRY.
YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE, WILL...
NOW THAT OUR ASTRAL DROPS ARE GONE, WE NEED A COVER STORY FOR EVERY MISSION.
I WONDER HOW WE CAN KEEP FINDING NEW EXCUSES.
CHEER UP, GUYS! AUNTIE IRMA'S ALREADY THOUGHT OF THAT.
REALLY, GENIUS? WHAT DID YOUR LITTLE BRAIN COME UP WITH?
SPIT IT OUT, IRMA!
BE AS SARCASTIC AS YOU LIKE, CORNY, BUT SOON, YOU'LL KISS THE GROUND I WALK ON.
WELL, MOM JUST GAVE ME THE THIRD DEGREE, AND I HAD TO MAKE UP A REALLY IMPORTANT REASON TO GO OUT...
MAYBE IT COULD BE THE OFFICIAL ALIBI FOR OUR LAST-MINUTE TRIP TO KANDRAKAR.
WHAT'D YOU TELL HER?
THAT WE STARTED VOLUNTEERING AT THE PET SHOP. COMMUNITY SERVICE TO BUMP UP OUR GRADES.
GREAT!
REALLY CLEVER!
AWESOME...
NICELY DONE, WUNDERKIND. I UNDER-ESTIMATED YOU.

DON'T GET TOO EXCITED, HAY-HAY!
SORRY. IT'S JUST I FEEL GUILTY ALWAYS LYING TO MY PARENTS.
THERE'S NO OTHER WAY. AND YOU'RE NOT DOING IT FOR FUN...
I KNOW, BUT...TELLING LIES STILL MAKES ME FEEL BAD.
ORUBE'S LUCKY. SHE DOESN'T HAVE THAT PROBLEM.
SPEAKING OF WHICH, WILL, WHERE DID YOU LEAVE HER?
MR. OLSEN'S SHOP.
...AND I BET SHE'S WITH MATT NOW.
THE SHOT! I ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT IT!

ANYBODY WANT TO WALK WITH ME?
I'LL COME.

"GREAT, WILL. WE CAN CHAT A BIT."
WE'RE TIRED AND NERVOUS.... SOMETHING'S GOING ON...
HAY LIN IS FREAKING OUT, TARANEE IS LIVID...AND YOU'RE SO QUIET, WILL. WE'RE CHANGING...

"...AND I GET THE FEELING NOTHING WILL BE THE SAME ANYMORE."
THERE YOU GO, BUDDY. NOW GET BACK IN YOUR CAGE...
Olsen's
CAGE! CAGE!
I SEE YOU'RE DOING GREAT, REBECCA!
YES...I LIKE THE JOB AND TAKING CARE OF THE PUPPIES. I CAN'T THANK MR. OLSEN ENOUGH FOR HIS FAITH.
FAAAITH! FAAAITH!
...OR HIS CASH! SHE SEEMS SO HONEST. IF SHE REALLY TOOK IT, SHE MUST'VE HAD A GOOD REASON...
HEY, KITTY! LET'S GIVE YOU A GOOD GROOMING, OKAY?
REBECCA, I...
PURR PURR
WELL...IT'S A DELICATE ISSUE. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PUT IT...
JUST SAY IT, MATT. I THINK I KNOW WHAT IT IS...
IT'S ABOUT WILL, ISN'T IT?
IN A WAY...
I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT IT TOO. LATELY, SHE'S BEEN SO WEIRD. SHE'S CLEARLY WORRIED ABOUT SOMETHING.


THIS MIGHT BE OVER THE LINE, BUT DON'T YOU THINK SHE MIGHT FEEL GUILTY...
...ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED HERE? THE MONEY YOU TOOK FROM THE TILL?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, MATT.
HOW CAN HE KNOW ABOUT THE MONEY THE ASTRAL DROPS TOOK? I PUT IT BACK BEFORE MR. OLSEN COULD FIND OUT!
I ASSURE YOU, I NEVER DID ANYTHING LIKE THAT. IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, ASK YOUR GRANDAD!
NO, I...SORRY. I MUST HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD.
I UNDERSTOOD PERFECTLY! WILL COULDN'T HAVE BEEN CLEARER!
DID SHE REALLY BELIEVE REBECCA DID IT, OR WAS SHE JUST TRYING TO PUT HER IN A BAD LIGHT?
DRIIN
MATT, CAN YOU GET IT? I'M HOLDING THE KITTENS!
DRIIN DRIIN
...IF SO, WHY? SHE KNOWS THIS JOB IS IMPORTANT TO REBECCA...SHE GOT IT FOR HER! NOW SHE'S ACTING...
...JEALOUS! OF COURSE! THAT WOULD EXPLAIN HOW DISTANT SHE'S BEEN LATELY...
DRIIN DRIIN
MATT! THE PHONE!

...BUT NOTHING JUSTIFIES SOMETHING SO MEAN... IT'S NOT LIKE WILL.
DRIIIN DRIIIN DRIIIINN
OKAY, I'LL GET IT! TAKE THEM!
DRIIIINN DRIIIINN
HUH?
MEOW
SCRATCH
OUCH!
DRIIIINN
HAPPY? THEY HUNG UP!
URGH... I...I'M SORRY!
33
DID YOU GET HURT?
HERE WE ARE, NAPOLEON. NOW, TRY TO BE A GOOD KITTY...
TH-THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THEN...THEN, IT'S TRUE!
IT'S NOTHING... JUST A SCRATCH.

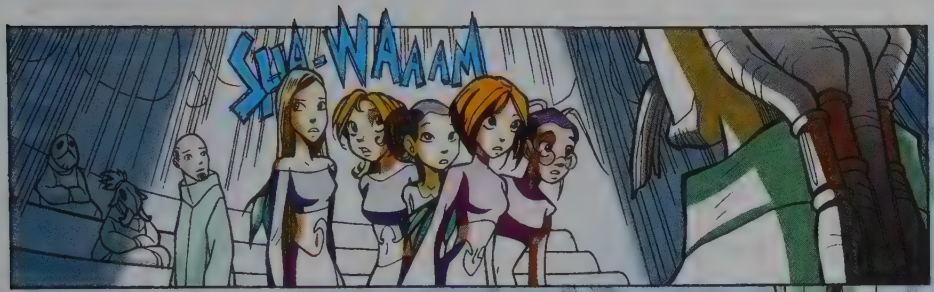
WILL!
TRUNN
WHAT'S UP WITH HER?
CORNELIA!
OH, LOOK! OUR NAPOLEON. WE WERE WAITING FOR YOU!
SORRY FOR THE DELAY, MR. OLSEN!
NO WORRIES. LET'S GO IN THE BACK, AND THIS YOUNG MAN IS COMING WITH US.
HEY!
TIME TO MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL INSTEAD OF SPENDING YOUR TIME DISTRACTING MY ASSISTANTS.
WHAT'S WRONG? YOU SEEM UPSET...
I'M THINKING ABOUT WILL. SHE WALKED ME HERE, THEN RAN OFF FOR NO REASON!
WE'LL HAVE TO SAVE THE EXPLANATIONS FOR LATER, CORNELIA.
I THINK WE'RE NEEDED IN KANDRAKAR NOW!
A TIMELY INTERRUPTION...

12 ALMOND STREET.
FOR MOST, THIS IS JUST A PET SHOP.
PET
SHOP
BUT FOR WILL, IT'S A SPECIAL PLACE FULL OF UNFORGETTABLE EMOTIONS...
JOY.
PAIN.
HOPE.
THE SAME HOPE SHATTERED A FEW MOMENTS AGO THROUGH THE WINDOW.

MEMORIES FLEE, BUT THIS ISN'T THE TIME TO CHASE THEM...
PUFF... PANT!
...BECAUSE A MUCH MORE IMPORTANT TASK AWAITS THE GUARDIANS NOW.
THERE YOU ARE! WE WERE AFRAID YOU'D ALREADY LEFT.
WE HEARD THE CALL!
...AND RAN TO LOOK FOR YOU. IT'S TIME, HUH?
LOOK AT THE HEART. IT'S NEVER BEEN SO BRIGHT.
TIME TO TRANSFORM. AIR!
A WAVE OF IRRESISTIBLE CHARM!
LET'S GO HEAT THINGS UP AT THE FORTRESS!
BETTER TO STAY GROUNDED!
OKAY, GUYS! LET'S STICK TOGETHER. KANDRAKAR AWAITS WITH...

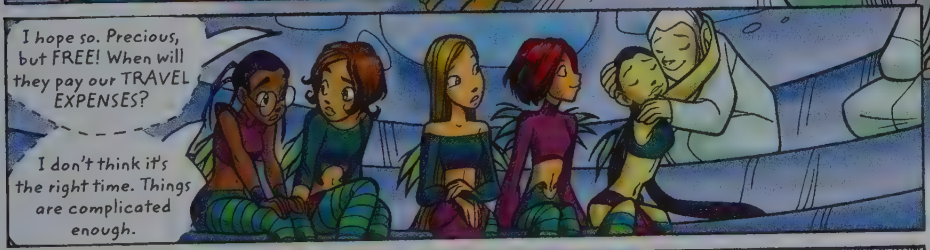
...AN URGENT APPOINTMENT? OUT OF THE BLUE?
SHE SAID SHE SUDDENLY REMEMBERED AND WILL BE BACK FOR NAPOLEON AS SOON AS SHE CAN.
TOO BAD. I HOPE IT'S NOTHING SERIOUS...
WILL AND HER FRIENDS TAKE WEIRD TO A NEW LEVEL.
THEN WE'LL HAVE TEA WITHOUT CORNELIA...
...AND YOU'LL KEEP ME COMPANY A BIT LONGER, HUH, LITTLE ONE?
MEOW

KANDRAKAR.
BLACK CLOUDS GATHER OVER THE FORTRESS.
THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT FACES ITS DARKEST HOUR.
A TENSE ATMOSPHERE CASTS ITS SHADOW ON THE USUALLY QUIET HALL. THE WISE MEN WAIT IN SILENCE...
...AND THE QUIET, RESERVED ONE WHOSE DUTY WAS TO OBSERVE...
...IS NOW UNDER OBSERVATION.

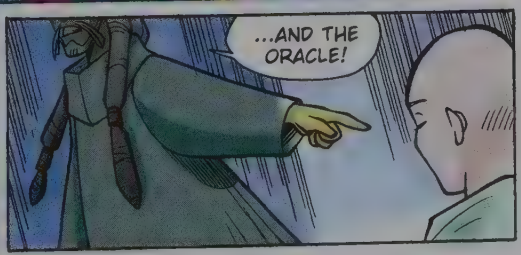

SHA-WAAAM

THANKS FOR COMING, GUARDIANS. THE CONGREGATION WAS WAITING FOR YOU.
IS THIS A BLIND DATE, OR ARE YOU TRYING TO SAVE ON ELECTRICITY?

IRMA!
HAVE YOU LOOKED AROUND? WE'RE GONE A COUPLE DAYS, AND THEY REVAMP THE HALL!
PLEASE TAKE A SEAT ON THE WITNESS STAND. YOUR PRESENCE IS VERY PRECIOUS...


I hope so. Precious, but FREE! When will they pay our TRAVEL EXPENSES?
I don't think it's the right time. Things are complicated enough.

YOU'LL HELP US MAKE A DECISION VITAL FOR THE FUTURE OF KANDRAKAR...


...AND THE ORACLE!

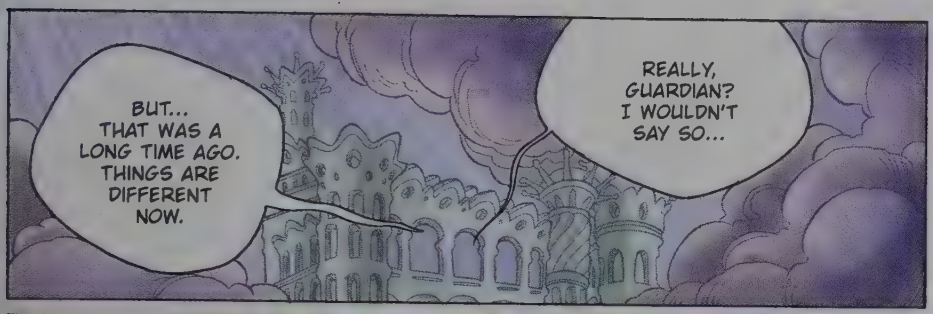
UH-OH! I'm afraid BALDY is in serious trouble!
AND I THINK THAT IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP, SOMEONE WILL KICK YOU OUT...
I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHO THAT GUY THINKS HE IS, HAVING THE NERVE TO TALK LIKE THAT...
MY NAME IS ENDARNO... AND I'M HERE TO PROVE THAT THE ORACLE HAS FREQUENTLY VIOLATED KANDRAKAR'S LAWS.
I'M SURE THIS OPINION IS SHARED BY MOST OF US!
Speak for yourself, you arrogant, cheeky...
Grandma!
...BUT MANY ARE STILL UNCERTAIN AND NEED FURTHER PROOF TO DECIDE WHOSE SIDE THEY'RE ON.
ENDARNO'S ACCUSATIONS HAVE MERIT, BUT THE ORACLE... HE'S ALWAYS BEEN MY LORD. HE TRUSTS ME, AND I RESPECT HIM. HOW CAN I DENY HIM?
THE CONGREGATION NEEDS YOU, GUARDIANS. THE ORACLE HAS OFTEN CALLED ON YOU TO ACCOMPLISH GREAT TASKS. I ASK YOU TO REVIEW THE MOST RECENT...
...AND HELP US UNDERSTAND.

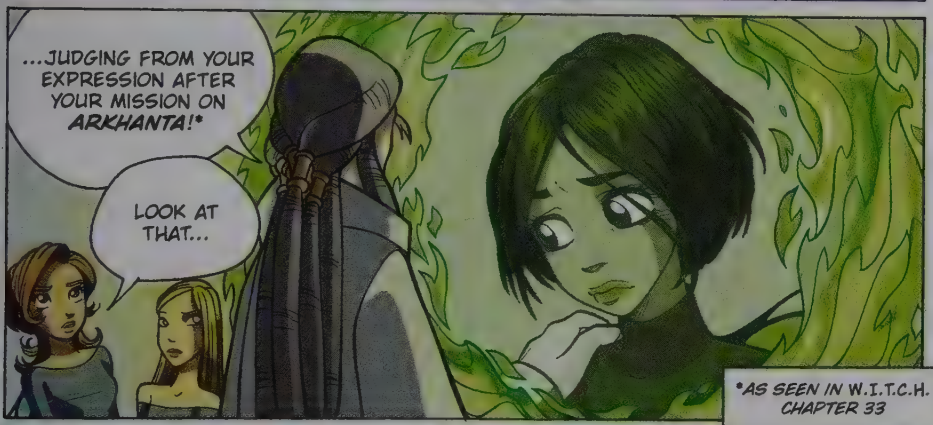
HAVING SAID THAT, WISE MEN OF THE CONGREGATION, I PRESENT THE FIRST WITNESS...
...THE CUSTODIAN OF THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR!
I'M...I'M READY TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS, ENDARNO. BUT FIRST, THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO SAY.

MY FRIENDS AND I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PROUD TO SERVE KANDRAKAR. WE'VE OFTEN BEEN INVOLVED IN MISSIONS WE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, THAT'S TRUE...
GO, WILL! SHOW HIM WHO W.I.T.C.H. ARE!
...BUT IF IT ALL WORKED OUT, IT WASN'T JUST THANKS TO US...
HEY, HANG ON! WHAT'S SHE SAYING?
BECAUSE THE ORACLE GUIDED US!
I MEAN, MAYBE SOMETIMES WE FELT FORCED TO TRUST HIM, BUT IN THE END, HE WAS ALWAYS RIGHT.
AND I...WE...ARE SURE THAT THE LORD OF KANDRAKAR HAS ALWAYS TRIED TO MAKE THE BEST CHOICES.
WILL, MY YOUNG FRIEND...YOU ARE STANDING UP FOR ME, AND I AM HONORED...
...BUT YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT THIS ISN'T HOW YOU REALLY FEEL. I CAN SENSE IT...
...AND I KNOW ENDARNO WILL SOON REALIZE IT TOO.
THOSE ARE UNCALLED-FOR EXCUSES. I EXPECT FACTS, NOT OPINIONS...

...AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, HONESTY.
APPARENTLY, YOU NEED A LITTLE HELP TO REMEMBER.
SHAZZ
LOOK!
WHAT IS THE PROBLEM, WILL?
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, SIR, YOU'RE THE PROBLEM!
WE'RE SICK OF BEING TREATED THIS WAY. WE'RE SICK OF YOUR ATTITUDE!
43
SO, GUARDIAN, HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE THIS EPISODE? SERENE ACCEPTANCE OF THE ORACLE'S WISE CHOICES OR OPEN REBELLION AGAINST HIS AUTHORITY?
SIR...THOSE WERE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND...*
WILL'S RIGHT. SHE WAS JUST TRYING TO UNDERSTAND. CALEB HAD JUST TOLD ME HE WOULD GO BACK TO MERIDIAN AND...
*W.I.T.C.H. CHAPTER 23

...AND IT TURNS OUT THE ORACLE ALREADY KNEW BUT DECIDED TO KEEP IT TO HIMSELF!
SOMETHING YOU SHOULD LEARN TO DO TOO!
OOPS!
HMM... I UNDERSTAND.
...THAT'S WHY YOU COULDN'T STAND HIM ANYMORE. WHAT DID YOU CALL HIM... INSUFFERABLE?
UGH! I SAID THAT? I DIDN'T MEAN...
...HOW DID THE ORACLE RESPOND TO YOUR ACCUSATIONS?
YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS IS IRRELEVANT, GUARDIAN. YOU'RE NOT THE ONE ON TRIAL. WHAT I REALLY WANT TO KNOW IS...
WELL... ACTUALLY, HE...
...DIDN'T RESPOND.





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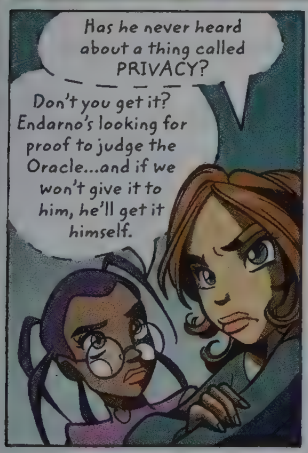
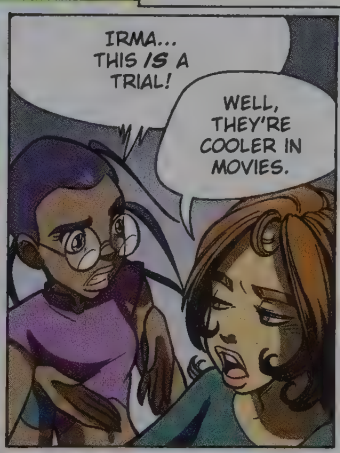
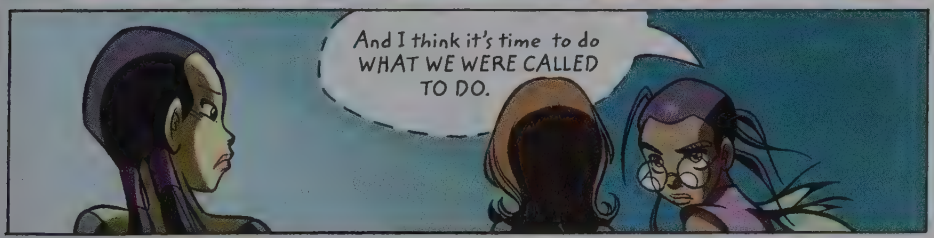






BE OURSELVES AND SAY WHAT WE FEEL...ISN'T THAT WHAT HAY LIN'S GRANDMA SAID?
THE CONGREGATION IS ANXIOUS TO HEAR YOUR TESTIMONIES, GUARDIANS.
IF I DON'T TALK, I'M GONNA EXPLODE, BUT IF I DO...WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE ORACLE?
...OR DOES YOUR SILENCE MEAN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO ADD?
GOOD. THEN I WILL PROCEED BY...
WAIT A MINUTE, SIR.
I...I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY. IT'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN FEELING FOR A WHILE...
I TRIED TO HIDE IT, TRIED TO SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY, BUT TRY AS I MIGHT, I CAN'T GET RID OF THIS TERRIBLE FEELING...
...OF HAVING BEEN USED!

USED BY THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR. IT BARGED INTO OUR LIVES AND LOADED US WITH DUTIES BIGGER THAN US, RESPONSIBILITIES WE NEVER ASKED FOR.
USED BY THE ORACLE. WE WERE PUPPETS IN HIS HANDS, AND WHAT DID WE GET? A GIFT WE DIDN'T ASK FOR. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THAT IS HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE.
AND WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, RIGHT NOW, I FEEL USED BY YOU, ENDARNO! FORCED TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS OF A WORLD NOT MY OWN.
TARANEE. I THOUGHT YOUR RESENTMENT TOWARD ME HAD FADED, BUT I WAS WRONG.
"WHY DID YOU HOLD ALL THIS PAIN INSIDE? WE COULD HAVE TALKED ABOUT IT...
"I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU THERE IS NO MALICE IN KANDRAKAR'S ACTIONS. THAT YOU ARE NOT PUPPETS, BUT INSTRUMENTS...
"...AND THAT BEING CHOSEN AS GUARDIANS MEANS ACTING TO PRESERVE THE BALANCE OF ALL THINGS...
"BUT NOW IT IS TOO LATE. YOUR STATEMENT IS PROOF OF GREAT HONESTY AND COURAGE, BUT ALSO..."

CRIPES, TARA. THAT WAS BRUTAL!
THAT'S WHAT I CALL TALKING WITH ARDOR, GIRL.
...A CRUSHING CONDEMNATION OF THE ORACLE'S ACTIONS, WISE MEN OF THE CONGREGATION.
YOU COULD HAVE MENTIONED HIM FREEING THE ASTRAL DROPS... A REAL PAIN IN THE NECK!
OOF! AND JUST WHEN MY DOUBLE FINALLY LEARNED HOW TO DEAL WITH MARTIN!
GOOD POINT, GUARDIAN... AND THANKS FOR THE TIP!
Well done. I thought you didn't wanna help him?
HAY LIN, YOU LOOK UPSET. YOU HAVEN'T SAID A WORD.
I C-CAN'T, GRANDMA. I DON'T FEEL LIKE IT.
IF YOUR FRIENDS HAVE NO FURTHER OBJECTIONS...

...THE ISSUE WITH THE ASTRAL DROPS AND THE MEMORY SPELL ARE THE LAST INCIDENTS I WISH TO BRING TO THE CONGREGATION'S ATTENTION.
TWO OCCASIONS WHERE THE ORACLE USED THE POWERS THAT COME WITH HIS AUTHORITY...
...TO RADICALLY ALTER THE COURSE OF EVENTS.
ORACLE... MY AFFECTION FOR YOU IS BOUNDLESS, BUT ENDARNO IS RIGHT. CAN YOU FORGIVE ME?
I DON'T THINK THIS REQUIRES ANY FURTHER COMMENT.
I... I THINK IT DOES, SIR.
A-AT LEAST FROM THE ORACLE. WHY HAS NOBODY ASKED HIS OPINION? DOESN'T HE HAVE A RIGHT TO DEFEND HIMSELF?
THAT'S MY GIRL. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? "YUS!"
HE HAS THAT RIGHT AND DUTY, MY SENSIBLE HAY LIN. I APPRECIATE YOUR BRAVE STATEMENT. I KNOW HOW HARD IT WAS FOR YOU...

...BUT TOO MANY WORDS HAVE ALREADY UPSET THIS TRANQUIL REFUGE, AND I HAVE NO INTENTION OF SPEAKING ANY MORE.
MY PRIORITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN PRESERVING KANDRAKAR'S SERENITY...AND THE BALANCE OF ALL THE WORLDS IT PROTECTS.
EVEN NOW, THIS IS WHAT I CARE ABOUT THE MOST.
SO I WILL LET MY PAST ACTIONS SPEAK FOR ME. I SUBMIT TO THE JUDGMENT OF THE CONGREGATION.
SO BE IT.
THE DEFENDANT AND WITNESSES MAY LEAVE THE HALL.
"IT'S TIME FOR THE ASSEMBLY TO REACH A VERDICT."

CAN YOU SEE HIM, WILL? WHAT'S HE DOING?
HE'S SITTING WITH HIS EYES CLOSED. I THINK...HE'S MEDITATING...
MAN! WHY CAN'T WE GO IN THERE AND TALK TO HIM?
WE'VE ALREADY SAID MORE THAN ENOUGH, DON'T YOU THINK?
BUT...WHAT IF HE FEELS SICK? IN HIS SHOES, I'D HAVE A KILLER HEADACHE.
I DON'T THINK SO, IRMA. HE'S THE ORACLE, NOT JUST ANYONE.
WHADDAYA MEAN?
THAT HE'S... A SUPERIOR BEING. GRANDMA EXPLAINED IT TO ME. AT WORST, HE MIGHT BE A BIT TIRED...HE DOESN'T EVEN GET HUNGRY OR THIRSTY.
HE DOESN'T EAT OR DRINK? THEN WHAT THE HECK DOES HE DO ALL THE TIME?
I BET HE CAN SUFFER...

I LIED.
A MOMENT AGO, BEFORE THE WHOLE CONGREGATION, FOR THE FIRST TIME, I LIED TO THE WISE MEN...AND TO MYSELF!
AND WITH THAT LIE, I OPENED MY HEART TO THE DARKNESS THAT SURROUNDS THE FORTRESS.
52
MY SPIRIT IS MURKY, TORMENTED BY THE MEMORY OF THE UNTRUTHFUL WORDS I DARED SPEAK.
I SAID I PLACED KANDRAKAR'S SERENITY ABOVE ALL ELSE, BUT THAT IS FALSE.
SINCE THE TRIAL BEGAN, ONLY ONE QUESTION HAS CONSUMED ME...
WHAT WILL BECOME OF ME?

I SENSE THE THREAT CLOSING IN WITH GREAT STRIDES BUT CANNOT STOP IT OR GUESS WHAT SHAPE IT WILL TAKE TO ATTACK ME...
"...SOMETIMES, BEING THE ORACLE ALMOST FEELS LIKE A CURSE."
...AN ORACLE WHO CAN'T GIVE SUFFICIENT JUSTIFICATIONS TO HIS GUARDIANS FOR THEIR MISSIONS...
AN ORACLE WHO FORSAKES HIS DETACHED ROLE AND USES HIS POWERS TO MEDDLE IN THE COURSE OF EVENTS...
TO PREVENT FUTURE MISCONDUCT, A FITTING SENTENCE HAS BEEN DECIDED...
...IS AN ORACLE UNWORTHY OF THE TITLE.
YOU WILL BE EXILED, LORD OF KANDRAKAR, TO THE WORLD FROM WHICH YOU CAME... BASILIADE!
TOO OFTEN, YOU HAVE INAPPROPRIATELY BEHAVED LIKE A SIMPLE HUMAN!
53
I APOLOGIZE, MY LORD. I BEGGED ENDARNO TO SPARE YOU THIS PUBLIC HUMILIATION... BUT MY WORDS FELL ON DEAF EARS.

YOU WILL REACH BASILIADE IN YOUR NEW GUISE...AS A COMMON MORTAL...
...ALL YOUR POWERS WILL BE WASHED AWAY AS YOU STEP THROUGH THE GREAT WATERFALL.
SOME BARRIERS SEEM IMPOSSIBLE TO CROSS...
...BUT WE OVERCOME THEM WITH SURPRISING EASE...
...BECAUSE THINKING ABOUT THE CHALLENGES OF THE PAST GIVES US THE COURAGE TO FACE AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE.

THE MOMENT OF BIRTH MUST BE QUITE SIMILAR...
...A SERIES OF UNKNOWN SENSATIONS OF UNBEARABLE INTENSITY.
LIKE THE IRRITATION CAUSED BY WET CLOTHES CLINGING TO THE BODY...
...OR EYES BURNING BECAUSE OF THE BLINDING LIGHT...
YOU FEEL DISORIENTED, SHAKING AT THE COLD FOR THE FIRST TIME...
...AS THE CROWD AROUND YOU WAITS FOR A GESTURE, A REACTION...
...A WORD, YOUNG MAN.
YOU'RE BACK TO WHAT YOU WERE BEFORE BEING ELECTED ORACLE...AN IMPRESSIVE RESULT.
?

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO THE CONGREGATION BEFORE LEAVING THE FORTRESS *FOREVER*? MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD...
...SPEAK *YOUR NAME*.
ENDARNO, I...
SIR... IF YOU KNOW IT, TELL ME, BECAUSE I...
...I HAVE FORGOTTEN IT.
A SHAME, BECAUSE I HAVE *NO INTENTION OF TELLING YOU*. SAME GOES FOR WHAT USED TO BE YOUR *TRADE*.
WHAT COULD SOMEONE WEARING THOSE CLOTHES BE? A FARMER? A CARPENTER? MAYBE A SQUIRE?

POOR ORACLE...FROM RICHES TO RAGS.
YOU'LL HAVE TO FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF. YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO ROAM BASILIADE...IN SEARCH OF A PAST IT NOW SEEMS YOU NEVER LIVED.
BASILIADE! A NAME FLOATING IN EMPTINESS...THE ONLY CLUE TO WHICH I CAN CLING.
I KNOW NEITHER WHO I AM NOR WAS...BUT I KNOW FROM WHENCE I CAME AND WHERE I AM ABOUT TO RETURN.
A WORLD POPULATED BY HUMANS I HAVE OBSERVED FOR A LONG TIME...BUT WHO ARE STILL STRANGERS TO ME.
NOW GO...AND DON'T TURN BACK. A LONG JOURNEY AWAITS YOU...
...FAR FROM THIS PLACE AND ITS INHABITANTS.
YOU'RE ABOUT TO BEGIN ANEW...

"...AND THE SAME GOES FOR *KANDRAKAR*."

I MEAN, IT'S *OUTRAGEOUS*! DID YOU SEE HOW HE *DISSED HIM*?

THIS TIME, YOU'RE RIGHT, CORNY!

HE TREATED HIM LIKE DIRT, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE FACT THAT HIS POWERS ARE...*WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE*!

WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT THAT SOMEDAY I'D BE *ROOTING FOR THE ORACLE*?

DON'T CALL HIM THAT. HE'S *NOT THE ORACLE ANYMORE*, IRMA, AND ALL THIS HAPPENED...

DON'T FEEL GUILTY, TARANEE.

OR YOU, GIRLS. NO *REMORSE*, PLEASE.

GRANDMA!

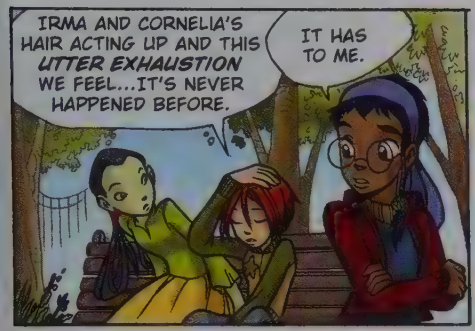
YOU HAD A TOUGH TASK TO DO, WHICH YOU FACED BRAVELY...EACH IN HER OWN WAY...

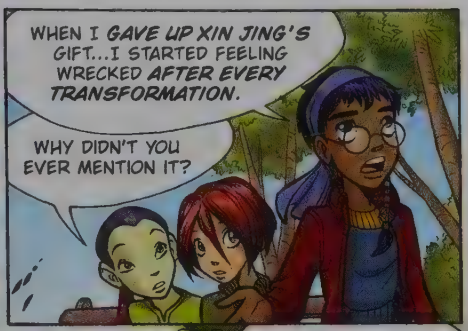
...BUT WE DON'T ALWAYS SEE THE RESULTS OF OUR ACTIONS RIGHT AWAY, AND I'M AFRAID IT WILL TAKE SOME TIME.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

THE CONGREGATION WILL HAVE AN EMERGENCY SESSION. KANDRAKAR CAN'T BE WITHOUT A GUIDE.
COUNSELOR ENDARNO CONVINCED MANY TO TAKE HIS SIDE, BUT A GROUP OF WISE MEN STILL OPPOSE HIS ELECTION.
LET ME GUESS. YOU'RE THE LEADER OF THIS GROUP.
WELL, "LEADER" ISN'T THE WORD I'D USE, BUT...
HEY, HANG ON. YOU SAID ENDARNO MIGHT BE ELECTED NEW LORD OF KANDRAKAR. THIS MEANS THERE'LL BE A VOTE, AND...
YES, WILL. I'M ONE OF THE CANDIDATES.
AWESOME! A GRANDMA ORACLE! A GRANDMA ORACLE!
COOL! OUR WORKING TRIPS TO KANDRAKAR WOULD BE LIKE HOLIDAYS!
CONSIDER THIS THE OFFICIAL START OF YOUR FAN CLUB!
I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOUR ENTHUSIASM. BUT IT'S TOO SOON TO CELEBRATE...
"NOW YOU HAVE TO LEAVE THE FORTRESS..."

"HEATHERFIELD NEEDS ITS YOUNGSTERS."
OOF! GUYS, DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE NOT EXHAUSTED TOO.
I...CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT THE ORACLE. I FEEL RESPONSIBLE.
TARANEE, DON'T. YOU HEARD GRANDMA. IF ANYONE HAS TO FEEL GUILTY FOR HURTING HIM, IT'S NOT YOU...
RIGHT. THE BAD GUY IS THAT ENDARNO DUDE.
BUT I'M SURE HE'LL PAY FOR IT. MOM ALWAYS SAYS "YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW."
INTERESTING THEORY. WONDER WHAT SHE HAS TO SAY ABOUT YOUR HAIR!
CLEARLY, YOU HAVEN'T LOOKED IN A MIRROR, MISS PERFECTION. OR SHOULD I SAY...MISS PORCUPINE?
WHY...? IS SOMETHING WRONG?
AAARGH! IT'S A DISASTER! WHY WON'T IT STAY DOWN?
IT'S REBELLING AGAINST YOU! I'D DO THE SAME IN ITS PLACE!
HMM... SOMETHING'S WEIRD...
YOU THINK? EVERYTHING SEEMS TYPICAL TO ME!





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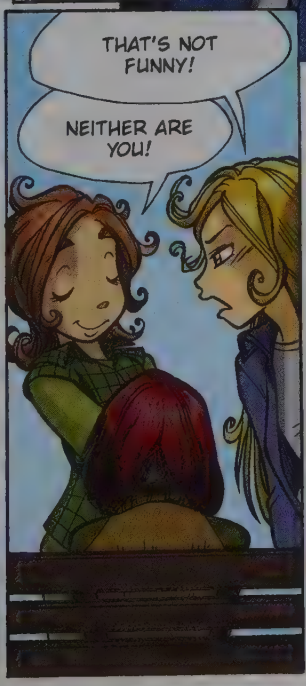


"BUT REMEMBER— WE GOTTA TALK. IT'S IMPORTANT!"
JUST WHAT WE NEEDED—PAYBACK FOR GIVING UP XIN JING'S GIFT.
SOME-TIMES, I JUST WANNA ESCAPE EVERYTHING AND NOT THINK ABOUT ANYTHING ANYMORE!
SUDDENLY, LIFE'S BECOME UNBEARABLY HARD...
...AND NOT JUST AS A W.I.T.C.H.!
WILL!
WHAT A NICE SURPRISE!
CORNELIA SENT ME TO PICK UP NAPOLEON.
HERE HE IS. HE WAS A VERY BRAVE KITTY!
GOOD.
?
!
MEOW

...AND SHE LEFT WITHOUT SAYING GOOD-BYE?
YEAH...
CHIN UP, MAN. YOU KNOW WHAT CHICKS ARE LIKE!
WE'D NEED A DEGREE TO UNDERSTAND THEM!
MAYBE... BUT I CAN'T GET USED TO IT.
I MEAN... IF I'D DONE SOMETHING WRONG I COULD ACCEPT IT, BUT...
HEY, THE FISH-MAN FINALLY GOT OUT OF THE WATER!
PLING PLING
BE LIKE HIM. ALL BASKETBALL, FRIENDS, AND SURFING.
WHAT'S THE WATER LIKE?
A BIT COLD...BUT THE WAVES WERE PRETTY GOOD!
WHAT WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
OUR FRIEND NEEDS ADVICE... ABOUT WOMEN!

YOU KIDDING? I'VE GOT TWO AT HOME. I COULD WRITE A BOOK!
THEN LET ME READ THE CHAPTER ABOUT THE YOUNGER ONE...
NIGEL!
MAYBE YOU CAN EXPLAIN WHY SHE CANCELED OUR DATE AT THE LAST MINUTE WITH SOME LAME EXCUSE.
UH... MAYBE SHE COULDN'T FIND A BETTER ONE?
C'MERE! YOU CHANGED YOUR LOOK, HUH?
YEAH...BUT I GET THE FEELING IT WON'T LAST! HEH!
SO TARANEE BLEW YOU OFF? THAT'S A GOOD START...
I'M SURE SHE DITCHED ME TO GO OUT WITH HER FRIENDS...
HEAR THAT, MATT? MAYBE YOUR REDHEAD WAS THERE TOO!
LEAVE HIM BE. DON'T YOU SEE HE'S CREATING?
WHAT'S THAT? A NEW SONG?
FORGET IT, PETE. HE LIKES BEING MYSTERIOUS.
YEAH, JOEL. WITHOUT MEANING TO, YOU HIT THE MARK. THIS SONG WILL BE ABOUT A MYSTERY...
...AN INTRIGUING, ENCHANTING MYSTERY!
END OF CHAPTER 37

38

The Heart's Desire

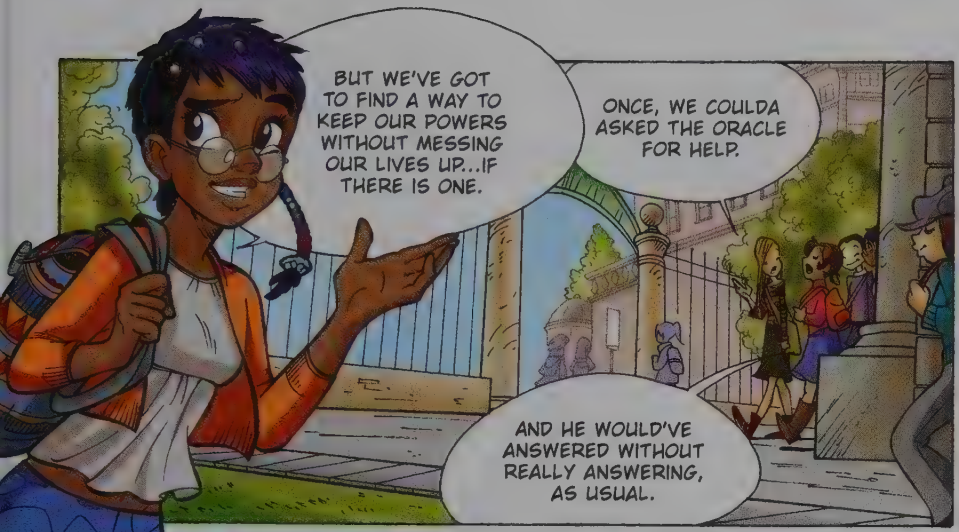
"When it blooms, it will be the most beautiful flower of all."

Witch
Will
Irma
Taranee
Cornelia
Hay Lin

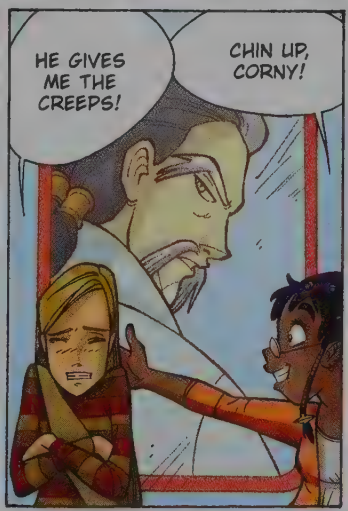
THERE ARE THINGS TEACHERS REALLY DON'T GET.
THIS IS UNACCEPT-ABLE!
THIS TEST IS COMPLICATED ENOUGH! DON'T MAKE THINGS WORSE!
IRMA, C'MON !!
WAKE UP!
KRRRROOFF
IRMA LAIR, THIS IS TOO MUCH!

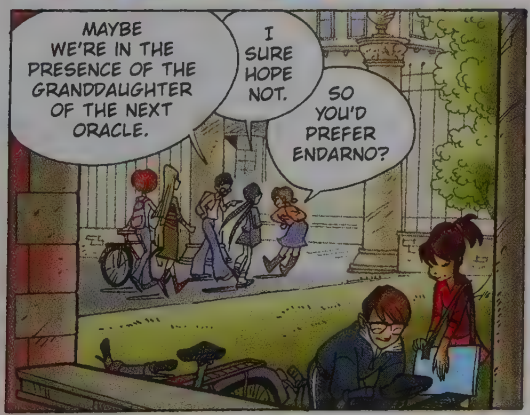
I'M TAKING YOUR ANSWER SHEET AWAY. I'LL MARK YOU ON WHAT YOU'VE WRITTEN SO FAR.
MOM, BRING ME MILK!
ZIP
AND MAYBE SOME COOKIES TOO?
MMPH... YES, THANKS. THE CHOCOLATE ONES!
HEH HEH HEH!
GOOD MORNING, IRMA. I HOPE I DIDN'T WAKE YOU AND THAT YOU WON'T MIND IF I CALL YOUR PARENTS!
AND... URGHH!
NOOO! PLEASE! PLEASE!
GIMME BACK THE TEST! I'LL DO GREAT— I SWEAR!
TOO LATE!

CLASSES ARE OVER.
WHAT A DISAS-TER.
AT LEAST YOU JUST RAN OUT OF TIME. WE DIDN'T FINISH BECAUSE OUR BRAINS WERE MUSH.
THERE THEY ARE!
I ♥ YOU!
CORNELIA AND WILL—THE ONLY ONES WHO FLUNKED THE MATH TEST!
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY! YOU STUDIED THIS STUFF LAST YEAR!
AND YOU STILL BARELY PASSED!
DID BETTER THAN YOU!
BAD MORNING FOR YOU TOO?
EVEN WORSE.
70
SINCE WE GAVE UP XIN JING'S GIFT, WE HAVE NO ENERGY, AND WE'RE ALWAYS TIRED...
YEAH. NOW I REALIZE HOW MUCH IT HELPED BEAR THE BURDEN OF OUR POWERS.
IT WAS EASIER TO KEEP OUR HAIR TIDY TOO.
DO YOU WISH WE HADN'T GIVEN IT ALL UP?
MAQI NEEDED THE GIFT MORE THAN WE DID.


BUT WE'VE GOT TO FIND A WAY TO KEEP OUR POWERS WITHOUT MESSING OUR LIVES UP...IF THERE IS ONE.
ONCE, WE COULDA ASKED THE ORACLE FOR HELP.
AND HE WOULD'VE ANSWERED WITHOUT REALLY ANSWERING, AS USUAL.

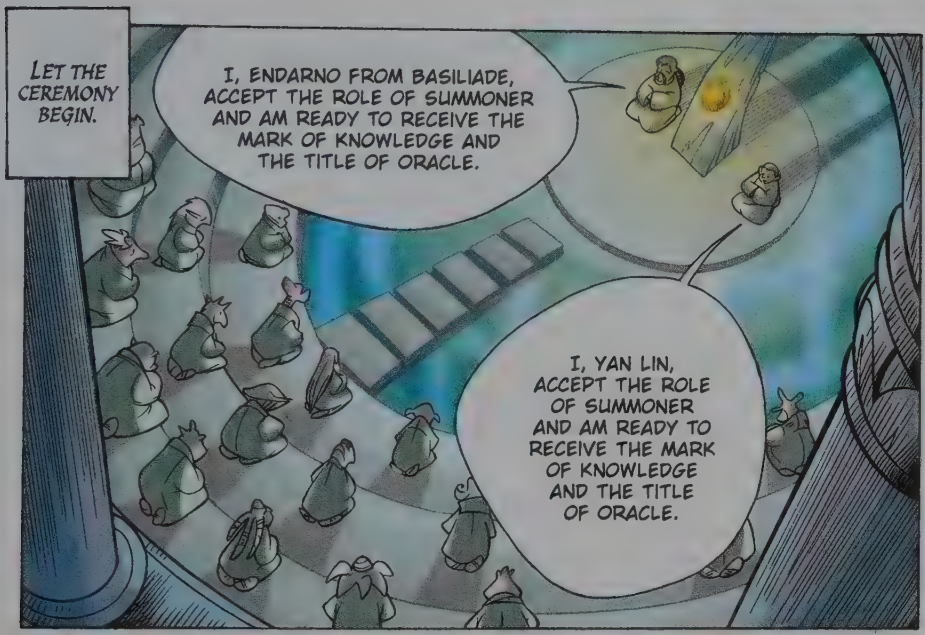
BUT IN THE END, HE'D HAVE HELPED ANYWAY.
I CAN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF THAT ENDARNO TAKING HIS PLACE.

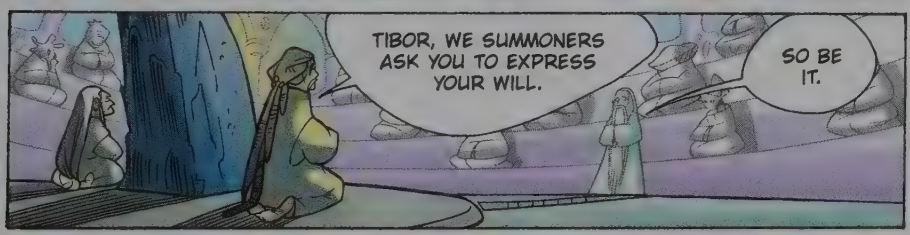

HE GIVES ME THE CREEPS!
CHIN UP, CORNY!


MAYBE WE'RE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF THE NEXT ORACLE.
I SURE HOPE NOT.
SO YOU'D PREFER ENDARNO?

NO WAY, BUT I LIKE THE THOUGHT OF GRANDMA FORGETTING WHO SHE IS— MAYBE EVEN ABOUT ME—MUCH LESS.

KANDRAKAR. THE CEREMONY OF REBIRTH, THE ELECTION OF THE NEW ORACLE, IS ABOUT TO BEGIN.
I DON'T LIKE IT, TIBOR. I DON'T LIKE IT AT ALL.
IT'S THE CONGREGATION'S DECISION.
IT'S THE CONGREGATION'S BIGGEST MISTAKE!
THE ORACLE WAS EXILED JUST WHEN HE'D MANAGED TO EXPRESS HIS HUMANITY!
YOUR ANGER WILL BE YOUR STRENGTH ONCE YOU BEAR THE MARK OF KNOWLEDGE.
IS THAT A HINT ABOUT WHO'S GETTING YOUR VOTE?
.....
IT'S TIME.


LET THE CEREMONY BEGIN.
I, ENDARNO FROM BASILIADE, ACCEPT THE ROLE OF SUMMONER AND AM READY TO RECEIVE THE MARK OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE TITLE OF ORACLE.
I, YAN LIN, ACCEPT THE ROLE OF SUMMONER AND AM READY TO RECEIVE THE MARK OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE TITLE OF ORACLE.


TIBOR, WE SUMMONERS ASK YOU TO EXPRESS YOUR WILL.
SO BE IT.

MAY MY CHOICE BE WISE AND BRING PEACE TO THE FORTRESS.

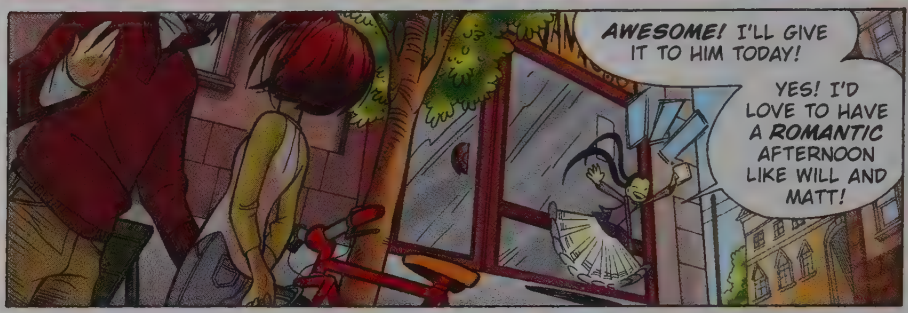
HEATHERFIELD
WILL, CAN YOU GIVE ME A LIFT? I GOTTA GO FOR A CHECK-UP, AND THE DENTIST IS NEAR YOUR HOUSE.
HOP ON!
MARTIN!
BYE, SEE YOU TOMORROW!
HURRY UP. I'M HUNGRY!
I'LL BE THERE IN A SEC.
WHAT'S UP?
SO WHEN DO YOU WANNA GET TOGETHER TO STUDY FRENCH?
I CAN'T, PUMPK... ER... IRMA!
YOUR CALENDAR'S FULL?
YEAH. SEE YA.
BUT...

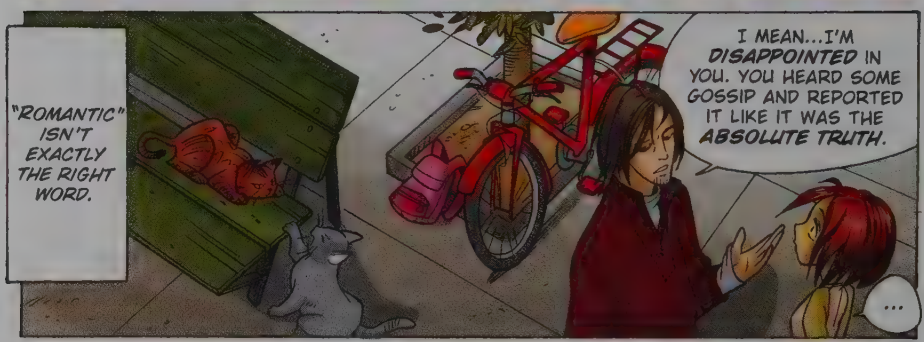
WHAT'S UP WITH HIM?
READY?
I'LL GO ON MY OWN.
MAN. SEE HOW UPSET SHE IS?
IT HAD TO HAPPEN EVENTUALLY.
SHE COULDN'T EXPECT MARTIN TO FOLLOW HER AROUND FOREVER.
BUT NOW SHE CAN'T STAND THAT HE'S MOVED ON.
YOU KNOW WHAT? I'VE NEVER SEEN IRMA IN LOVE.
ME EITHER. SHE LIKED ANDREW HORNBY, BUT IT'S NOT THE SAME.
BUT IF SHE'S NOT IN LOVE WITH ANYONE, IT'S BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T KNOW ANYONE TO FALL FOR.
IS THAT TODAY'S *PROFOUND THOUGHT*?
NAH, JUST AN *IDEA* I HAD!
TRY HARDER...

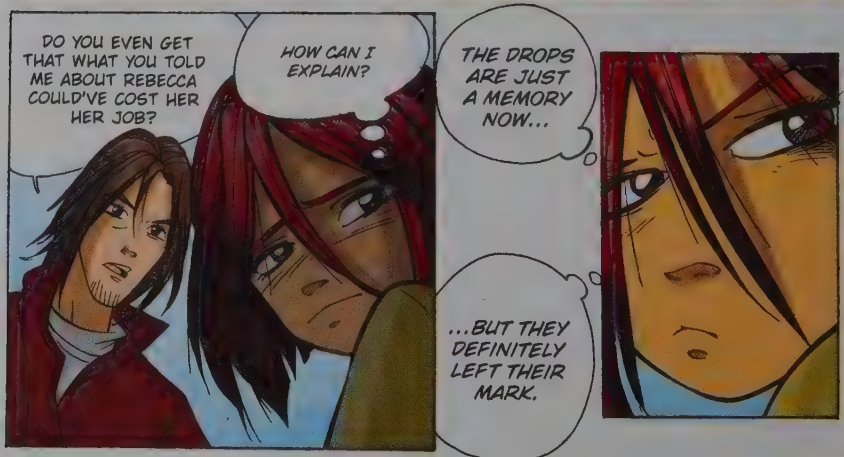
LET ME EXPLAIN. WHY DON'T WE INTRODUCE HER TO SOME NEW GUYS?
AND SHE'LL FIND SOMEONE TO FALL IN LOVE WITH! YOU ROCK, CORNELIA!
COME EAT AT MY PLACE. WE'LL ORGANIZE EVERYTHING.
SURE YOUR MOM'S OKAY WITH THAT?
DON'T WORRY, SHE WON'T MIND... I'LL TELL HER RIGHT NOW.
MEAN-WHILE...
STOOOP!
SKREEEK
SKREEEK
JUNK
OUCH!

GIRLS, YOU GOTTA BE MORE CAREFUL!
SORRY! THE BUS SWERVED, AND I...
DON'T WORRY. ANYWAY...I GOTTA TALK TO YOU ABOUT SOMETHING, WILL.
I'M GONNA HAVE A LOOK IN HERE...
...GOTTA SHOP TILL I DROP!
HMM... HEY, HOT NEWS!
LOOK AT THOSE TWO LOVE-BIRDS. I CAN GUESS WHAT THEY'RE SAYING.
"WILL, I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU."
"ME EITHER, MATT!"
"THEN WE'LL SPEND THE REST OF OUR LIVES TOGETHER, WILL!"
"EVEN LONGER, MATT!"
THEY'RE SO ROMANTIC!

YAY! HERE'S THAT RARE CD ERIC WANTED...AND IT'S ON SALE TOO!


AWESOME! I'LL GIVE IT TO HIM TODAY!
YES! I'D LOVE TO HAVE A ROMANTIC AFTERNOON LIKE WILL AND MATT!


"ROMANTIC" ISN'T EXACTLY THE RIGHT WORD.
I MEAN...I'M DISAPPOINTED IN YOU. YOU HEARD SOME GOSSIP AND REPORTED IT LIKE IT WAS THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH.
...


DO YOU EVEN GET THAT WHAT YOU TOLD ME ABOUT REBECCA COULD'VE COST HER HER JOB?
HOW CAN I EXPLAIN?
THE DROPS ARE JUST A MEMORY NOW...
...BUT THEY DEFINITELY LEFT THEIR MARK.

WILL, ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME? DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU ALMOST DID TO REBECCA?
PFFFT... LADIES AND GENTS, HERE'S THE TALE OF THE YOUNG, LOVESTRUCK KNIGHT...
...defending his beloved Orube...
...from the evil Will!
YOU INTRODUCED REBECCA TO ME, SO YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN SHE WOULD NEVER...
REBECCA! REBECCA! REBECCA! STOP HIDING BEHIND HER!
AT LEAST BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF IF YOU CAN'T DO IT WITH ME!
79
COME ON! TELL HER THE TRUTH THAT YOU DON'T HAVE THE GUTS TO ADMIT!
YOU CHOSE ORUBE? THAT'S FINE, BUT AT LEAST ADMIT IT!

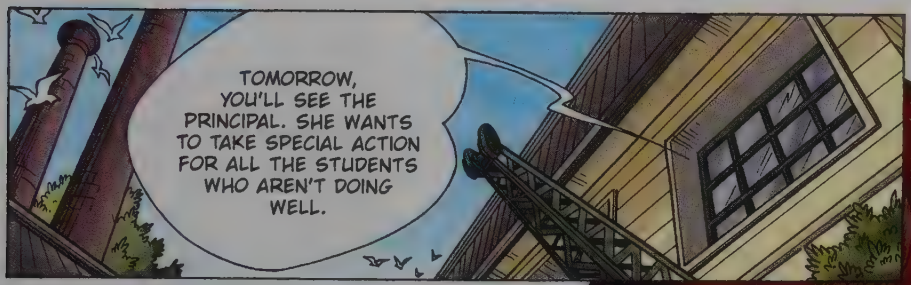
MEOWWW!
I THOUGHT I'D FOUND A FRIEND.
I THOUGHT I COULD TRUST YOU.
YOU JUDGED ME, SENTENCED ME, AND ATTACKED ME WITHOUT GIVING ME A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN.
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW ME.
BUT YOU ONLY SAW WHAT YOU WANTED TO SEE.
YOU DIDN'T ASK WHY I ACTED THAT WAY, DIDN'T EVEN THINK I MIGHT HAVE A REASON.

"YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO'S DISAP-POINTED."
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HER?
WHAT REASON COULD SHE HAVE HAD TO...?
...
FEH. TOO COMPLICATED. I GIVE UP!

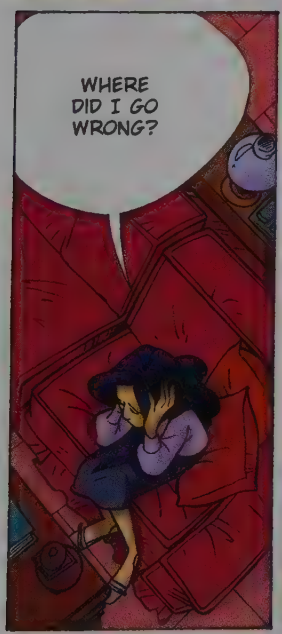
DOCTOR
KARL JANK
DENTIST
I READ A COOL BOOK ABOUT A CRAZY DENTIST WHO RIPPED HEALTHY TEETH OUT OF HIS PATIENTS... AND I NOTICE YOU DON'T HAVE ANY CAVITIES!
GHHH...
HA-HA-HA! I WAS KIDDING!
ANYWAY, I HAVE GREAT NEWS FOR YOU. YOUR BRACES ARE WORKING BETTER THAN I EXPECTED. WE CAN TAKE THEM OFF IN A COUPLE MONTHS!
REALLY?
SURE! WHY THE LONG FACE? YOU DON'T WANNA GET RID OF THEM?
WELL... I KINDA LIKE 'EM. I'VE GOTTEN USED TO THEM!
CHEER UP, HAY LIN. YOU CAN KEEP THEM A BIT LONGER, THEN YOU CAN SHOW OFF YOUR PERFECT SMILE!
TAP
THANKS, SIR!

HOME AT LAST...
I'LL DROP OFF MY BACKPACK, GO TO THE OBSERVATORY, AND...
BRLLING
BRLLING
GRAN —!
THE NEW ORACLE HAS BEEN CHOSEN, HAY LIN.
THE GUARDIANS HAVE TO ATTEND THE CEREMONY.
HURRY!
WHO'S THE NEW ORACLE? IS IT YOU?
AN ELUSIVE REPLY...
SHATZ
I GUESS ERIC AND HIS CD WILL HAVE TO WAIT.
HI, WILL!
PACK UP. WE GOTTA GO TO KANDRAKAR!
MARS

NO THANKS. I REALLY CAN'T. YOU GUYS HAVE FUN!
But, Will...
SHE HUNG UP!
TUT TUT TUT
HOW DO YOU THINK I FELT WHEN THE PRINCIPAL CALLED?
IF I'D KNOWN YOU WERE HAVING TROUBLE AT SCHOOL, I COULD'VE HELPED YOU BEFORE YOUR GRADES COLLAPSED.
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME? WHY?
I MIGHT BE ABLE TO GET OVER THE FLUNKED TESTS, BUT I CAN'T FORGIVE YOUR IRRESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR!
YOU HAVE TO GROW UP, WILL! LIFE IS NOT A GAME, AND SCHOOL IS YOUR TOP PRIORITY!


TOMORROW, YOU'LL SEE THE PRINCIPAL. SHE WANTS TO TAKE SPECIAL ACTION FOR ALL THE STUDENTS WHO AREN'T DOING WELL.

I'VE GIVEN HER MY FULL SUPPORT. NOW GO STUDY!
YES, MOM...


WHERE DID I GO WRONG?

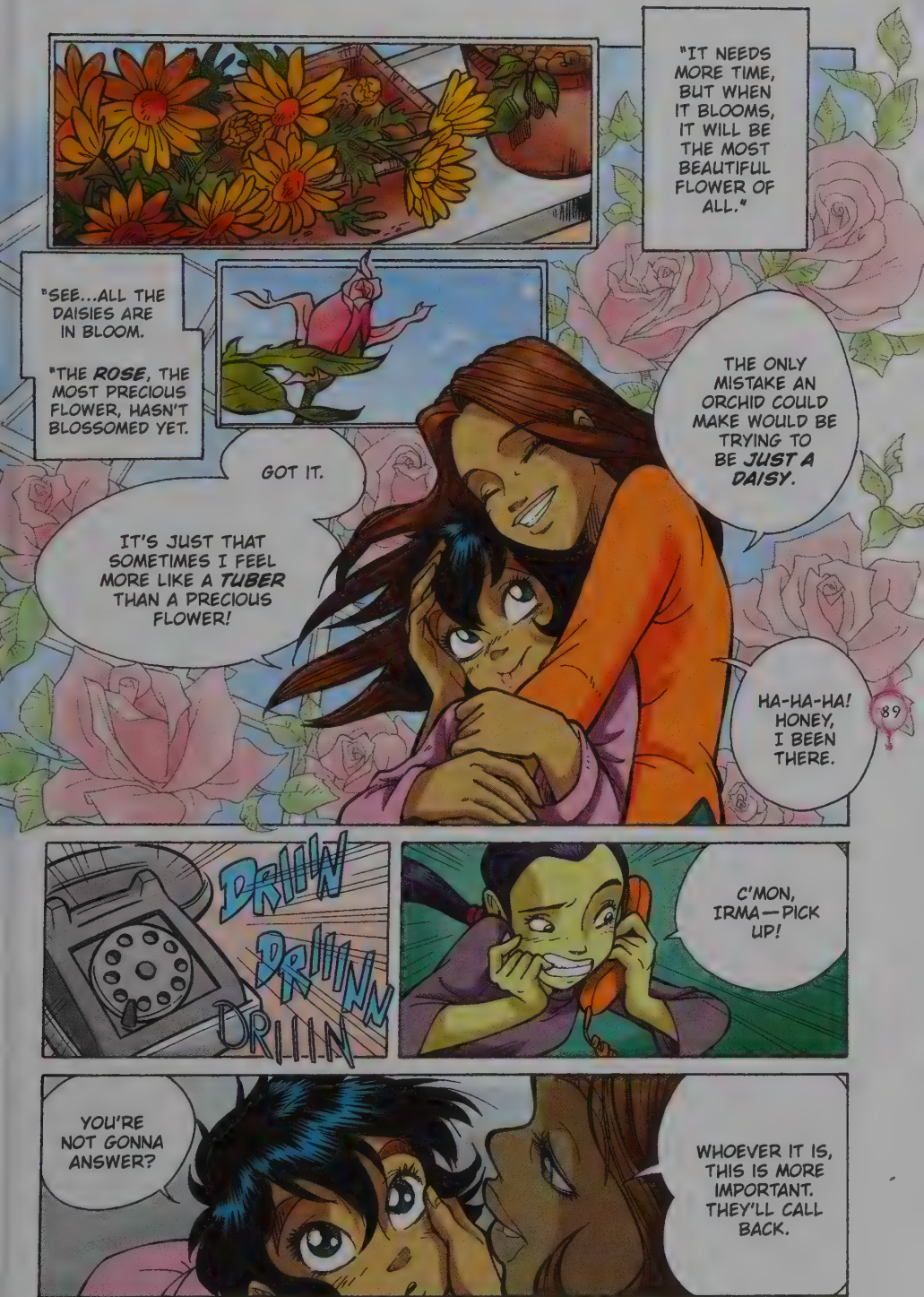
I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.
IF MY ASTRAL DROP WANTED TO RUIN MY LIFE, SHE SUCCEEDED!

MATT HATES ME. MOM HATES ME. I'M DISASTROUS AT SCHOOL.
I HOPE THE OTHERS ARE DOING BETTER...

SOME HOPE...
THANK YOU, MS. KNICKERBOCHER. THANKS FOR CALLING.
SOMEONE HAS SOME EXPLAINING TO DO!
IRMA!
WHAT DID YOU DO?
UM...I... WANTED TO CHANGE THINGS UP A BIT.
.....
MOM, SAY SOMETHING! ANYTHING. YELL AT ME, BUT PLEASE DON'T JUST STAND THERE STARING.

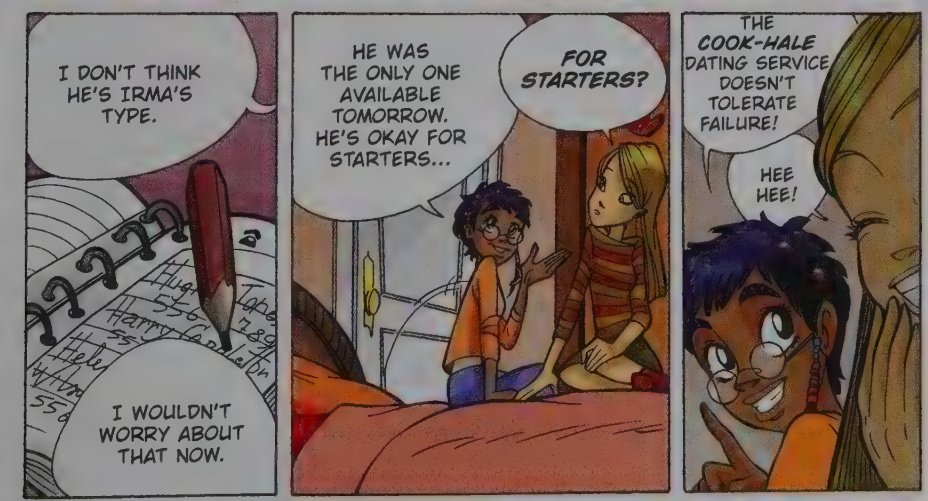
I JUST TALKED TO MS. KNICKERBOCHER. SHE SAID YOU'RE NOT DOING WELL AT SCHOOL AND YOUR BEHAVIOR'S PRETTY POOR.
MOM, I...
LET ME SPEAK. I COME TO TALK TO YOU AND BARELY RECOGNIZE YOU...
HONEY, IF THERE'S SOMETHING UP, YOU CAN TALK TO ME ABOUT IT.
MAYBE I CAN HELP. ISN'T THAT WHAT MOMS ARE FOR?
87
THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!
IF YOU REALLY WANNA KNOW, THEN YES, THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG IN MY LIFE.
AND WHAT IS IT?
THERE SHE IS. HER NAME'S *IRMA*!

LOOK AT ME AND TELL ME I'M NOT ALL WRONG!
I'VE GOT TURKEY KNEES AND DUCK FEET!
I'VE GOT HAMSTER CHEEKS, A FACE LIKE A BOILED COD, AND WONKY GUMS!
?!
WHAT ARE WONKY GUMS LIKE?
LIKE THE ONES OF A WEIRD PERSON WHO CAN'T FALL IN LOVE WITH ANYONE LIKE ALL HER FRIENDS CAN.
I EVEN MADE MARTIN HATE ME, MOM! CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?
COME WITH ME.
LOOK.
YOU WANNA GIVE ME A BOTANY LESSON?
LET'S CALL IT MOTHERLY WISDOM.


"IT NEEDS MORE TIME, BUT WHEN IT BLOOMS, IT WILL BE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER OF ALL."
"SEE...ALL THE DAISIES ARE IN BLOOM.
"THE ROSE, THE MOST PRECIOUS FLOWER, HASN'T BLOSSOMED YET.
GOT IT.
IT'S JUST THAT SOMETIMES I FEEL MORE LIKE A TUBER THAN A PRECIOUS FLOWER!
THE ONLY MISTAKE AN ORCHID COULD MAKE WOULD BE TRYING TO BE JUST A DAISY.
HA-HA-HA! HONEY, I BEEN THERE.
89
DRIIN
DRIINN
DRIIIN
C'MON, IRMA—PICK UP!
YOU'RE NOT GONNA ANSWER?
WHOEVER IT IS, THIS IS MORE IMPORTANT. THEY'LL CALL BACK.

"SEE... BEFORE MARRYING YOUR FATHER, I FELT LIKE A TUBER TOO. A TUBER FULL OF BUMPS!"
HEE-HEE-HEE! I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
SERIOUSLY. THEN WITH TOM, I DISCOVERED HOW PRECIOUS I WAS. MARRYING HIM WAS THE LUCKIEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO ME.
WRONG. YOU GETTING MARRIED WAS THE LUCKIEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO ME! WHAT WOULD I DO WITHOUT A MOM LIKE YOU?
AND WHAT ABOUT THE AWESOME PRESENT OF MY MONSTER OF A BROTHER?
I SEE YOU'RE FEELING BETTER!
90
AND TOTALLY READY TO FACE KNICKERBOCHER THE NEXT TIME SHE'S GOT FANTASIES TO SPREAD ABOUT ME!
AND YOUR... UM... HAIR?
IT'LL GO BACK TO NORMAL. IT'S JUST A TEMPORARY DYE.
OH, BY THE WAY!
THANK YOU!
SMACK

COOK HOUSE. MS. KNICKER-BOCHER JUST CALLED HERE TOO.
YES. HELLO, MA'AM. I'M TARANEE'S MOM. SURE, TELL ME.
WE DID IT! WE'RE AWESOME!
EVEN BETTER! WE MAKE A PERFECT DATING SERVICE!
HA-HA-HA! EVEN IF WE KEEP FAILING AT SCHOOL, WE STILL HAVE A CAREER FOR THE FUTURE!
BUT I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT HUGH JONES...


I DON'T THINK HE'S IRMA'S TYPE.
I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW.
HE WAS THE ONLY ONE AVAILABLE TOMORROW. HE'S OKAY FOR STARTERS...
FOR STARTERS?
THE COOK-HALE DATING SERVICE DOESN'T TOLERATE FAILURE!
HEE HEE!

TARA, RED ALERT!
OKAY!
RED ALERT MEANS "FURIOUS MOM INCOMING," NOT THAT YOU HAVE TO BLUSH.
UH...SURE... SORRY!
TARANEE!
MS. KNICKER-BOCHER JUST CALLED. SHE SAID YOUR GRADES...
I KNOW... IT'S ABOUT THAT PHYSICS TEST.
IT WAS DIFFICULT, AND I SCREWED UP. THAT'S WHY CORNELIA'S HERE.
YEAH!
SHE ALREADY STUDIED THAT STUFF AND IS HELPING ME OUT.
I HAVE TO GO NOW, BUT WE'LL DISCUSS IT TONIGHT!
YOU FIBBED TO YOUR MOTHER?
-Brrrng-
-Brrrng-
NOT EXACTLY. I REALLY DO WANT YOU TO HELP ME.
It's Hay Lin. Can I speak to Taranee, please?
TARANEE'S STUDYING WITH CORNELIA. CAN YOU CALL BACK LATER?

KANDRAKAR WILL HAVE A NEW ORACLE.
NOT ONLY AM I HERE ALONE, BUT GRANDMA'S NOWHERE TO BE SEEN...
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THE CONGREGATION FAILED TO REACH A UNANIMOUS DECISION.
TIMES ARE DARK. THE DIVISION IN THE COUNCIL IS PROOF.
THE ORACLE WON'T ENTER THE SPRING OF SILENCE AND WON'T RECEIVE ALL THE POWERS NECESSARY FOR THE ROLE.
THE LACK OF A UNANIMOUS VOTE REQUIRES A PERIOD OF OBSERVATION BEFORE THE COUNSELORS APPROVE THE ELECTION.
YOU JUST SAID IT.
NO, I MEANT HIS OR HER NAME BEFORE BEING CALLED THE ORACLE...
EXCUSE ME, DO YOU KNOW THE ORACLE'S NAME...?
HAY LIN, FOLLOW ME. NOT ANOTHER WORD!

"MAY THE ORACLE RECEIVE THE MARK OF POWER AND WITH IT VIRTUE AND FORESIGHT.
SHHH...
What happens now, Tibor?
"MAY THE CHOSEN ORACLE RECEIVE THE MARK OF KNOWLEDGE AND WITH IT WISDOM AND LEARNING."

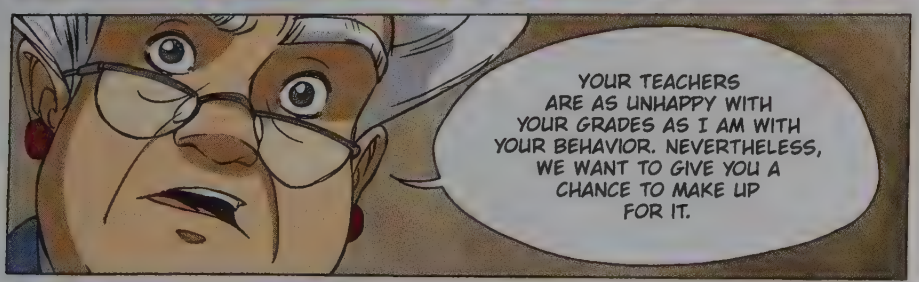
AAAH!
I, ENDARNO OF BASILIADE, RENOUNCE MY NAME AND ACCEPT THAT OF ORACLE.
I SWEAR TO SERVE THIS FORTRESS GUIDED BY THE VIRTUE AND WISDOM I'VE BEEN GRANTED.
I SWEAR ON MY HONOR THAT KANDRAKAR WILL WITNESS *MEMORABLE TIMES*!
GRANDMA ...

WE'LL CHANGE THE LAWS THAT FORCED US TO EXILE MY PREDECESSOR, MAKING US LOSE SUCH A VALUABLE GUIDE.
THE FORTRESS WILL NO LONGER BE *DETACHED* FROM THE REST OF CREATION. IT WILL BE PART OF IT!
THE FORTRESS HAS THE *POWER* TO GOVERN THE UNIVERSE AND BEARS A *MORAL OBLIGATION* TO DO SO!
THE ORACLE MUST BE FREE TO *ACT* WITHOUT BEING CONSIDERED *ARROGANT*.
THAT'S WHY WE MUST *CHANGE KANDRAKAR'S ANCIENT LAWS!*
"MEMORABLE TIMES," INDEED...

ENDARNO? BLEAH...
WHAT DO THOSE WISE MEN HAVE INSIDE THEIR SKULLS? MELTED CHEESE?
I SWEAR THAT GUY WAS GIVING ME THE CREEPS YESTERDAY.
I HOPE HE DOESN'T CAUSE US ANY TROUBLE.
WE'LL WORRY ABOUT THAT LATER. RIGHT NOW, OUR PROBLEM IS MS...
KNICKERBOC—

GOOD MORNING, GIRLS.

OH...AN UNEXPECTED REPLACE-MENT!
SORRY! I'LL GET OUT OF YOUR CHAIR.
I'LL GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT.


YOUR TEACHERS ARE AS UNHAPPY WITH YOUR GRADES AS I AM WITH YOUR BEHAVIOR. NEVERTHELESS, WE WANT TO GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO MAKE UP FOR IT.

WE'VE ASSIGNED YOU EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES THAT WILL HELP IMPROVE YOUR GRADES.
HALE, COOK, LAIR, AND LIN... YOU'LL HELP AS GUIDES AT THE MUSEUM. YOU'LL MEET THE DIRECTOR IN HIS OFFICE IN TWO HOURS.
WE'LL MAKE YOU PROUD!
YAY! WE'RE TOGETHER!
VANDOM, YOU'RE ON ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY SERVICE. YOU'LL HELP AT SOME ANIMAL SHELTERS.
WILL, DID YOU HEAR ME?
CAN YOU HEAR ME?
GIRLS, CAN YOU HEAR ME?
GRAND-MA?
I MUSTA EATEN TOO MUCH CAKE... I'M SEEING THINGS!

THE ORACLE NOTICED THAT MOST OF YOU WERE ABSENT FROM THE CEREMONY AND WANTS TO SEE YOU.
ALL OF YOU. RIGHT NOW.
I SHOULD BRING SOMETHING TO ERIC FIRST AND...
THE ORACLE SAID ALL OF YOU, RIGHT NOW.
?!
WHAT WAS I SAYING? OH YES...WELL... I THINK THAT'S ALL.
THANKS, MA'AM.
99
I don't like this. What do we do?
We have no choice.
HEART OF KANDRAKAR, TAKE US TO...

IS THIS KANDRAKAR?
THE HEART NEEDS A GOOD CHECKUP. IT MUST'VE TAKEN US TO THE WRONG PLACE.
I DON'T LIKE IT. NOT ONE BIT...
LOOKS LIKE A NIGHT-MARE!

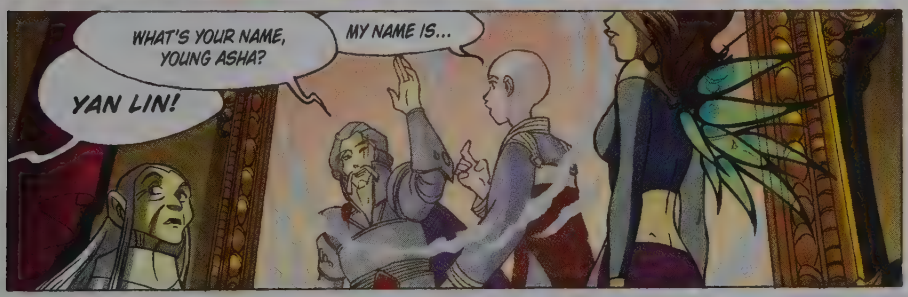
WELCOME.
GRANDMA!
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?
THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW SLIGHT CHANGES.
IF THEY'D BEEN BIG ONES, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE A FORTRESS LEFT!
LET'S SAY THE ORACLE IS SETTING US ON A NEW PATH.
PLEASE DON'T CALL HIM "ORACLE." AT LEAST WITH US, KEEP CALLING HIM ENDARNO.
WE NEED SOME TIME TO GET USED TO ALL THIS.
I DON'T WANNA GET USED TO IT.
THE NEW BOSS IS TROUBLE. I CAN FEEL IT.
YOU HAVE TO BE SENSIBLE, GIRLS. AND PATIENT...THE WAY I WOULDN'T KNOW HOW TO BE.
REMEMBER THAT YOUR ORACLE HELD ENDARNO IN HIGH REGARD.
WE NEVER SAID OUR ORACLE DIDN'T HAVE HIS FLAWS.

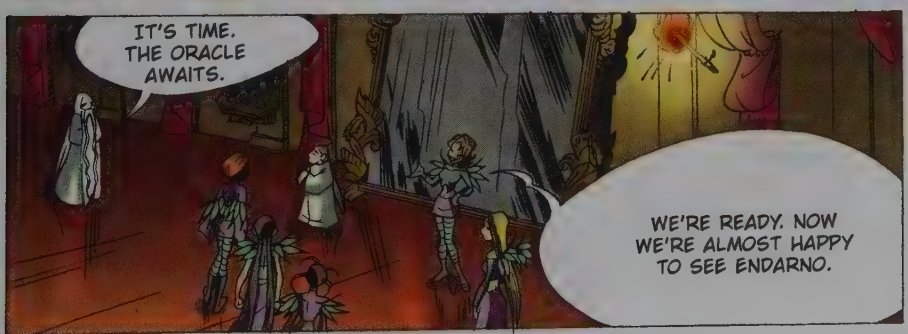
"LISTEN..."
ENDARNO AND THE ORACLE BOTH COME FROM BASILIADE, ORUBE'S WORLD.
WELL, THAT'S NOT ENCOURAGING.
ONCE UPON A TIME, THE PEOPLE OF BASILIADE FOUGHT ONE ANOTHER. PAIN AND DESPAIR REIGNED OVER THAT WORLD.
ENDARNO WAS A GREAT WARRIOR OF THE SHANTA PEOPLE. BRAVE AND PROUD, NOBLE AND LOYAL.
THE SHANTA WERE LED BY SHARR THE TERRIBLE. HIS ONLY GOAL WAS TO ANNIHILATE EVERY OTHER TRIBE ON BASILIADE.
WHAT AN UGLY MUG!
IF ENDARNO THE KILLJOY LEARNED FROM SHARR, THERE'S NOT MUCH TO BE HAPPY ABOUT.
LET ME FINISH...
ON THE SIXTH NEW MOON OF THE AGE OF WRATH, THE SHANTA DEFEATED THE ASHA, THE ORACLE'S TRIBE.

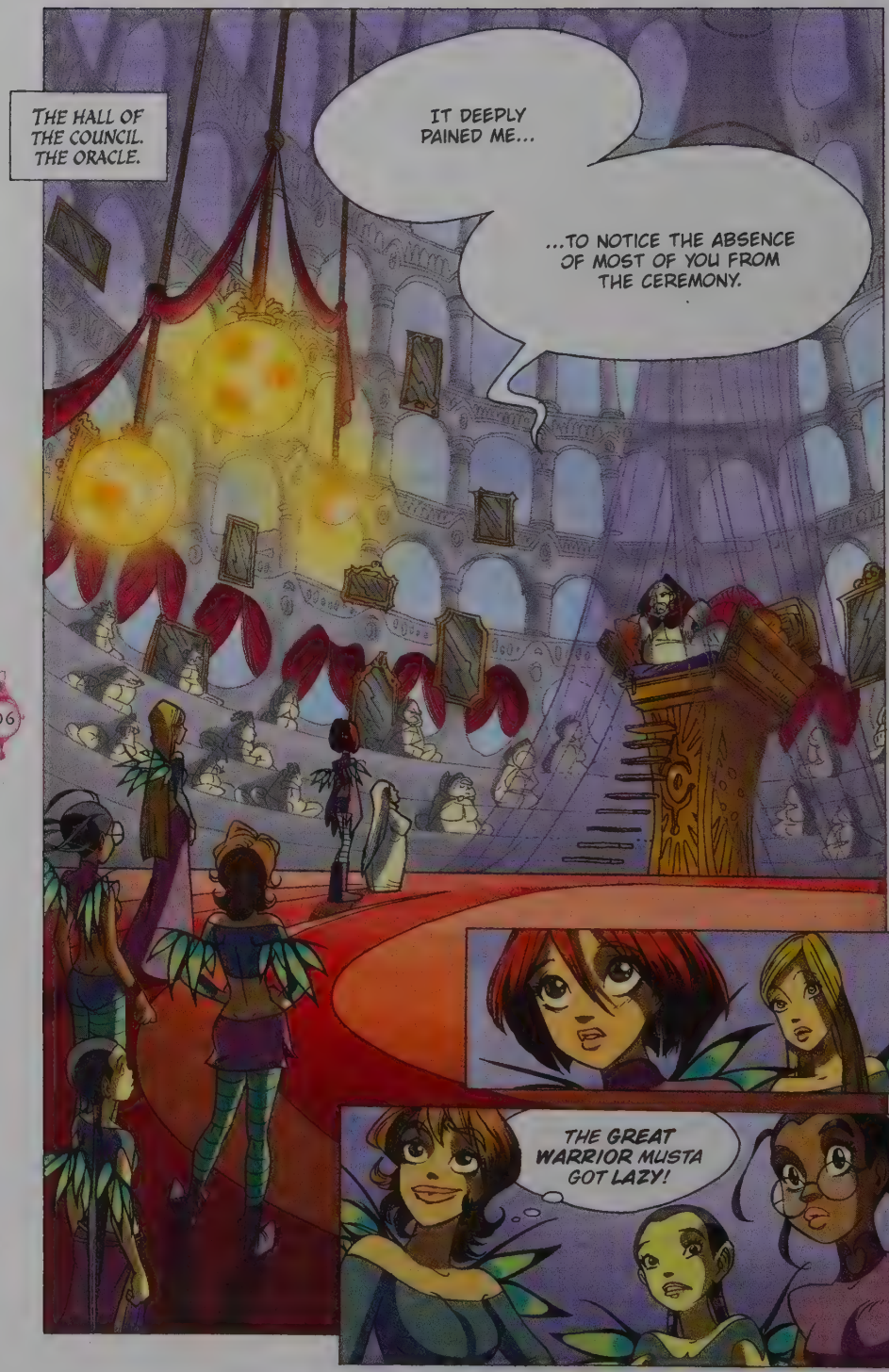
I, SHARR, CONDEMN ALL ASHA PRISONERS TO ETERNAL OBLIVION!
STOP!
I ASK THAT OUR VICTORY BE NOT ANOTHER PHASE OF THE WAR, BUT THE BEGINNING OF PEACE FOR BASILIADE.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, LITTLE ASHA ONE?
MAY WISDOM GUIDE YOUR DECISION.
THEN YOU WILL BE THE FIRST TO FALL!

KLANG
ENDARNO! YOU WILL PAY FOR THIS INSUBORDINATION!
THAT BOY...WAS THAT A YOUNG ORACLE?
DID YOU RECOGNIZE HIM?
HOW'D IT END?
AAAAAH!
GAH! THE UGLY MUG AGAIN!
TAKE HIM AWAY.
YOU DESTROYED MY KINGDOM! I'LL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!
ALLOW ME, SIR...
YOUNG ASHA...

I THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY PEOPLE AND MY INSIGNIFICANT LIFE. BUT I WILL ALWAYS BE INDEBTED FOR WHAT YOU TAUGHT ME WITH YOUR COURAGE.
THERE IS GREAT STRENGTH IN YOU.
AND IT'S NOT THE STRENGTH OF THE HAND THAT HOLDS THE SWORD.
SIR?
I'M TALKING ABOUT YOUR POWER. THE CALL I FELT WHEN THE BLADE WAS ABOUT TO STRIKE YOU.
TODAY, I FINALLY REBELLED AGAINST THE TYRANT, AND IT HAPPENED IN YOUR PRESENCE.
CULTIVATE YOUR POWER. BASILIADE WILL NEED IT.


WHAT'S YOUR NAME, YOUNG ASHA?
MY NAME IS...
YAN LIN!


IT'S TIME. THE ORACLE AWAITS.
WE'RE READY. NOW WE'RE ALMOST HAPPY TO SEE ENDARNO.


THE HALL OF THE COUNCIL. THE ORACLE.
IT DEEPLY PAINED ME...
...TO NOTICE THE ABSENCE OF MOST OF YOU FROM THE CEREMONY.
THE GREAT WARRIOR MUSTA GOT LAZY!

SINCE YOU'RE *VERY BUSY*, I WON'T KEEP YOU LONG.
I HAVE A REQUEST FOR THE CUSTODIAN OF THE SYMBOL OF THIS FORTRESS. COME FORTH, WILL.
HERE I AM.
RETURN THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR!
THAT'S IMPOSSI-BLE!
NO!
I DIDN'T EXPECT ANYTHING ELSE FROM YOU.

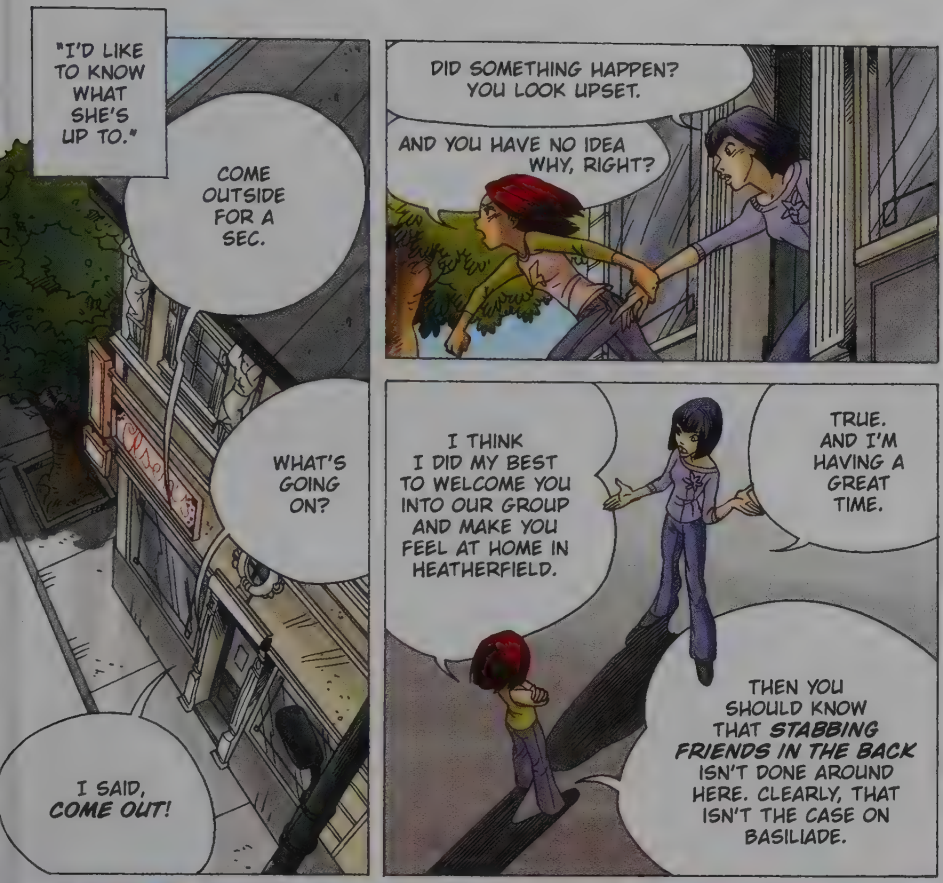
I CAN'T DEMAND THAT THE HEART BE RETURNED TO THE FORTRESS RIGHT NOW.
ONLY ITS CUSTODIAN CAN CHOOSE TO GIVE IT BACK.
EXACTLY.
BUT I ASK THE GUARDIANS TO THINK. THEIR YOUTH AND AFFECTION FOR MY PREDECESSOR...
...ARE CLOUDING THEIR JUDGMENT.
LET'S KEEP CALM.
WE'RE WITH YOU.
IF THE CUSTODIAN HAD GIVEN THE HEART BACK, I WOULD HAVE RETURNED IT IMMEDIATELY, BOWING TO HONOR HER. BUT CLEARLY, THESE GUARDIANS ARE TOO IMMATURE TO BOW TO THE AUTHORITY OF THE COUNCIL AND ITS CHOICES.
UNACCEPTABLE.
LUBA DID SAY THESE GIRLS WERE UNWORTHY.
THE GUARDIANS MAY GO BACK TO THEIR WORLD. FOR NOW, KANDRAKAR DOESN'T NEED THEM.
COME.

LET THE COUNCIL HONOR VAAL OF MERIDIAN.
HE'S THE NEW COUNSELOR TO THE ORACLE.
COME ON IN.
I SEE ENDARNO THE INTERIOR DESIGNER HASN'T GOTTEN HERE YET.
AND TO THINK I SAID WE WERE HAPPY TO SEE HIM!
SORRY. I'M SORRY. I COULDN'T DO IT. I FELT AS IF HE WAS ASKING ME TO HAND OVER A PART OF ME—TO ACTUALLY GIVE HIM MY HEART...
...AND I COULDN'T DO IT.

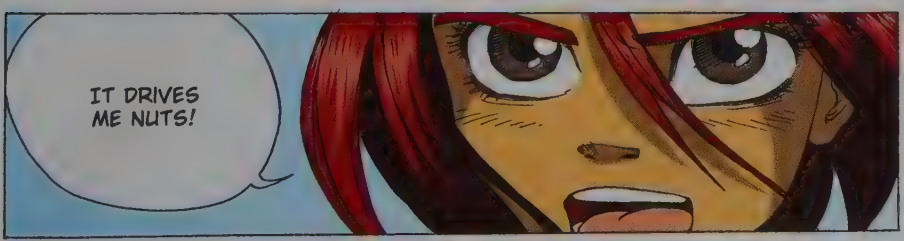
HEART OF KANDRAKAR...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I HOPE I DIDN'T MAKE A MISTAKE. MAYBE...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO GIVE IT TO ANYONE, MY CHILD.
YOU DIDN'T MAKE A MISTAKE, WILL. ENDARNO MAY HAVE BEEN A HERO IN THE PAST, BUT NOW...
SHE'S RIGHT. IF CORNELIA AND I AGREE, WE CAN'T BE WRONG.
TODAY YOU MADE YOUR CHOICE, WILL, BUT YOU HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO RECONSIDER.
BUT IF YOU WANT MY ADVICE, DON'T DO IT ANYTIME SOON!

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.
HAY LIN HAS TO START RIGHT AWAY.
MEANING NOW OR IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF DAYS?
I'LL NEED SOME TIME TO READ ALL THESE BOOKS, AND TODAY I SHOULD REALLY BRING SOMETHING TO SOMEON—
TRASH
WE HAVE A CLASS VISITING THE PREHISTORIC PAVILION TOMORROW...
...AND YOU'LL BE THE GUIDE. JUST STUDY THE PIECES ON DISPLAY.
YOU CAN WORK HERE. IT'LL BE MUCH EASIER.
BUT, DIRECTOR...AAAH... AAAH...
NO "DIRECTOR," PLEASE.
ACHOO!
MY NAME'S GEREMIA.

WHAT THE HECK IS THIS? WHAT CAN I SAY ABOUT A BOWL?
THAT IT WAS FOR SPOTOLD, THE PREHISTORIC DOG!
THAAANKS, IRMA. YOU'RE SUCH A GREAT HELP.
WELL... HAVE FUN, HAY LIN.
SORRY WE CAN'T STAY TO KEEP YOU COMPANY!
I GET A FEELING *FATE* DOESN'T WANT ME TO GIVE ERIC THE CD.
SEE YOU IN A COUPLE OF HOURS OUTSIDE THE CINEMA, OKAY?
OKAY. I'LL POP HOME AND CALL WILL.
AFTER WHAT HAPPENED IN KANDRAKAR, I'M WORRIED ABOUT HER.
BUT SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO WORK HERE AT THE MUSEUM.
AND SHE SAID SHE WAS BUSY.
YEAH.
BUT SHE DIDN'T WANT TO TELL US *WHAT* SHE'S BUSY WITH.


"I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT SHE'S UP TO."
COME OUTSIDE FOR A SEC.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
I SAID, COME OUT!
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN? YOU LOOK UPSET.
AND YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHY, RIGHT?
I THINK I DID MY BEST TO WELCOME YOU INTO OUR GROUP AND MAKE YOU FEEL AT HOME IN HEATHERFIELD.
TRUE. AND I'M HAVING A GREAT TIME.
THEN YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT STABBING FRIENDS IN THE BACK ISN'T DONE AROUND HERE. CLEARLY, THAT ISN'T THE CASE ON BASILIADE.

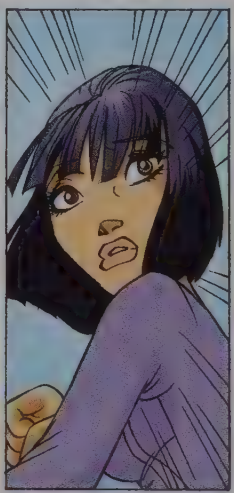
WHAT ARE YOU ON ABOUT?
DON'T PLAY DUMB!


IT DRIVES ME NUTS!

LISTEN...I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR YOUR NONSENSE. I GOTTA WORK.
YEAH, A JOB I FOUND FOR YOU.

I ALREADY THANKED YOU FOR THAT.
YOU THANKED ME WITH WORDS. THE FACT IS YOU STARTED PLAYING DIRTY...

...AND STOLE MATT FROM ME!



YOU COULD AT LEAST HAVE TOLD ME YOU LIKED HIM INSTEAD OF GOING BEHIND MY BACK!

IT WOULD'VE BEEN AN EVEN FIGHT, BUT YOU—THE ONE WHO CLAIMS TO BE A GREAT WARRIOR—ACT LIKE A COWARD!
WILL... THERE'S NOTHING BETWEEN ME AND MATT.
WE'RE JUST GOOD FRIENDS, THAT'S ALL.

SUUURE. I BET. YOU'RE A LIAR TOO!

THAT'S ENOUGH.
YOU'VE GONE TOO FAR. THINK WHATEVER YOU WANT.
YOU COULD APOLOGIZE. I'D EXPECT AT LEAST THAT FROM YOU!
IF YOU WANNA KNOW, AT FIRST I DIDN'T LIKE YOU AT ALL.
THEN I GOT TO KNOW YOU AND STARTED LIKING YOU.
I SAW HOW YOU FIGHT. YOU'RE A TRUE LEADER WHO NEVER LEAVES ANYONE BEHIND.
YOU'RE AN EXCEPTIONAL GUARDIAN AND A TRUE WARRIOR.
TOO BAD YOU'RE SO CHILDISH!

YOU GOTTA GROW UP, WILL!
THESE GUARDIANS ARE TOO IMMATURE!
TOO BAD YOU'RE SO CHILDISH!
BI BI BIBI BIP BIBI BIP
Will, pick up! It's Taranee!
YOU'D BETTER RUN OUT OF BATTERIES NOW.
I KEEP GETTING EVERYTHING WRONG LATELY, SO I DON'T WANT TO DO OR SAY ANYTHING HASTY.
She knows the line is FREE!
CLIC
Besides, I like her, so...

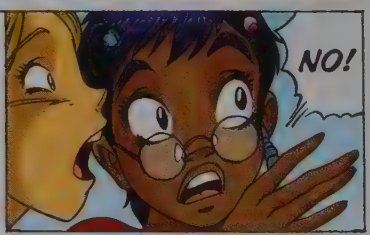
5:50 P.M., SIDERAL CINEMA
WELL... SHALL WE GO IN?
WE'RE WAITING FOR SOMEONE. YOU DON'T MIND IF THEY TAG ALONG, DO YOU?
AS LONG AS THEY DON'T KEEP TALKING DURING THE MOVIE!
THERE HE IS!
HI, CORNELIA!
HE'S THE ONE WE WERE WAITING FOR?
BLINK
THIS IS HUGH... AND THESE ARE TARANEE AND IRMA.
HI!
WHERE'D YOU FIND HIM?
SECRET!
IRMA... WHAT A NICE NAME!

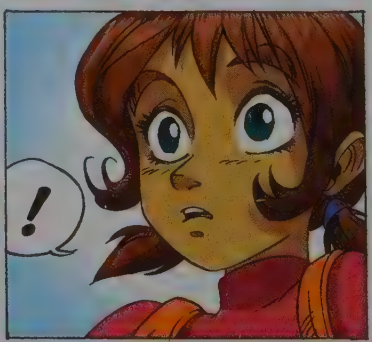
WE HAVEN'T SPOKEN IN SO LONG. I'M GLAD YOU CALLED.
SINCE OUR GANG SPLIT UP, I NEVER HEAR FROM ANYONE. I THOUGHT I'D MAKE UP FOR IT— STARTING WITH YOU!

GUYS...I'M... I THINK I'M ABOUT TO...

...PASS OUT!
TARANEE!

HAVE A SEAT.
WHAT CAN I DO? DO YOU NEED SOME WATER?
I CAN CALL MOM TO COME GET US!


NO!


!

I'M A BIT BETTER, BUT I'D RATHER GO HOME. WILL YOU WALK ME, CORNELIA?
SURE, SWEETIE.
WE'LL ALL COME.
NO, PLEASE... I'D FEEL TOO BAD.
SERIOUSLY?
YOU TELL HER, HUGH. YOU TWO, AT LEAST, SHOULD SEE THE MOVIE. I DON'T WANT TO RUIN EVERYONE'S DAY.
OKAY. IF NEED BE, I'LL DRAG IRMA INTO THE THEATER BY HER HAIR!
BUT I'LL KEEP MY CELL ON VIBRATE. IF YOU NEED US, GIVE ME A CALL!
GOOD, HUGH. THAT'S A GREAT IDEA.
WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU UP TO?
WHY ALWAYS SO SUSPICIOUS ...?
GO ON, IRMA... ENJOY THE COMPANY!
HEE-HEE-HEE!
THE COOK-HALE DATING SERVICE IS OFF TO A GREAT START!

CAN ANYONE SURVIVE A DULL AFTERNOON STUDYING PREHISTORY?
I'LL GO GET HIM.
TH-THANK YOU, MR. LYNDON.
SBAM
I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME.
WORKING AT THE MUSEUM HAS KILLED ME. LOOK AT MY SHIRT... IT'S ALL DUSTY.
ALL THE OMENS WERE BAD! ERIC WON'T LIKE MY PRESENT. I'LL HAVE TO MAKE UP ANOTHER REASON WHY I CAME.
HI, HAY LIN! WATCHA DOING HERE?
UH! UM! I...UH...
HI, ERIC! I'M HERE TO... TO...TO...

OH, ENOUGH. I CAME TO DUMP THIS ON YOU.
DUMP?
MAYBE YOU DON'T WANT IT ANYMORE, SO YOU CAN ALWAYS THROW IT AWAY OR AT MY HEAD.
I DON'T WANNA SEEM CLINGY, BUT WHEN I SAW IT...
SMELLING A RAT BY THE BLACK SHADOW!
THIS IS, LIKE, IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND!
IT'S SUPER-RARE! AWESOME! I WANTED IT SO MUCH!
SO YOU LIKE IT!
I...

SBAM

I KISSED HER, THEN SLAMMED THE DOOR IN HER FACE.
I'M AN IDIOT!
MY FIRST♡ KISS♡...
YAY!

SHEFFIELD INSTITUTE, THE NEXT DAY.
AFTER YESTERDAY, YOU'RE LUCKY I'M STILL TALKING TO YOU.
DIDN'T YOU HAVE FUN?
Sheffield Institute
"OH, SURE. HOW COULD I BE BORED WITH MR. FUNTIMES?
HEE-HEE!
HA-HA-HA!
HA-HA-HA!
HA HA!
HA-HA-HA! HA-HA-HA!
HAW!
?!?
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?
"THEN IT GOT EVEN WORSE!"
YOU REALLY WANT ALL THAT?
OKAY!
PIZZA WITH FRIES, SUPER-MAXI ORANGE JUICE, AND CHOCOLATE ICE CREAM.
WELL, SINCE I JUST ORDERED IT...
YOU GOTTA EAT HEALTHIER.

I'LL TEACH YOU HOW TO EAT PROPERLY. UNSEASONED TOMATOES FOR TWO, WELL WASHED, PLEASE!
STRAP
SEE? TASTY, NUTRITIOUS, AND HEALTHY!
EATING IS IMPORTANT. I NEVER EAT ANYTHING AT PARTIES.
IF THERE'S CAKE, I ASK IF IT WAS MADE WITH FRESH EGGS.
YOU SHOULDN'T EAT TOO SWEET...
...OR TOO SALTY!
OR TOO BITTER OR TOO SOUR!
I HAD NO IDEA HE WAS LIKE THAT...
IF YOU THINK I CAN'T FIND A GUY BY MYSELF, YOU'RE BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE.
THAT'S NOT IT!
IT'S JUST THAT YESTERDAY, WITH MARTIN...
WE JUST WANTED TO CHEER YOU UP...
REALLY?
WE SWEAR!
WELL... YOU MIGHT TOTALLY SUCK AS BOYFRIEND-FINDERS...
...BUT YOU'RE THE BESTEST OF BEST FRIENDS!

KANDRAKAR
BEGIN THE CELESTIAL SEARCH.
I WANT THE NEW GUARDIANS TO BE STRONGER AND MORE POWERFUL. WE'LL PICK THREE.
AND THEY SHOULD LOOK GOOD...NOT LIKE THOSE FIVE LOSERS!
AS YOU WISH.
A PIECE OF ADVICE FOR YOU, YAN LIN.
DON'T GET IN MY WAY!
END OF CHAPTER 38

39

A Flutter of Wings

"Can the cruel flight of a butterfly erase a whole existence?"

Witch
Will
Irma
Taranee
Cornelia
Hay Lin

WHAT IS MAGIC?
MAGIC IS LIGHT IN FLIGHT.
IT'S SOARING IN THE AIR ABOVE EVERY THOUGHT.
MAGIC IS AN INSTANT, AND CORNELIA IS LIVING IT IN FULL, OPENING HER EYES AGAIN...
...AS SHE BEGINS HER DESCENT AT THE ICE RINK, SPINNING GENTLY.

AH!
SKREEEETCH
CORNELIA!
ARE YOU HURT?
I... I DON'T THINK SO, MISS PINNEY.
HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU STUDENTS NOT TO TAKE RISKS LIKE THAT?
I'M SORRY. OWWW...! I GOT CARRIED AWAY.
I'M NEVER GONNA HEAR THE END OF IT FROM YOUR MOM. REMEMBER WHEN YOU FELL AT THE NATIONAL CHAMPION-SHIPS?
YES, BUT THIS TIME, NOTHING'S BROKEN. I'M SURE.

"I'LL HANDLE MOM."
WHAT HAPPENED?
DON'T WORRY, MOM. JUST A LITTLE FALL.
ARE YOU LISTENING TO YOUR DAUGHTER, HAROLD?
SORRY, HONEY? I'M TRYING TO FOLLOW THE NEWS. THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT A BAD FINANCIAL CRASH.
NEWS 1
CAN YOU STILL FEEL YOUR TOES?
GET OFF ME, LITTLE MOUSE. NOW IS NOT THE TIME.
PATRICIA LIPTING'S BIG SISTER SAYS SKATING IS DANGEROUS.
MIND YOUR OWN BUSI-NESS.
YOUR FRIEND'S SISTER IS RIGHT! ALL SPORTS ARE DANGEROUS IF YOU DON'T CONCENTRATE ON WHAT YOU'RE DOING.
WHAAAT?

LET ME REMIND YOU—I'VE WON MEDALS FOR SKATING!
EXACTLY! YOU'RE TOO COCKY!
PATRICIA LIPTING'S BIG SISTER ALSO SAYS...
AND I TOLD YOU TO SHUT UP!
AND STOP READING MY JOURNAL!
AH!
MOOOOM!
THERE, YOU MADE HER CRY!
SHE'S PRETENDING TO CRY! AND SHE STARTED IT!
REMEMBER LILIAN IS STILL LITTLE!
IS THAT WHY YOU LET HER DO WHATEVER SHE WANTS ?
DIARY
DON'T YOU TAKE THAT TONE WITH ME! GO TO YOUR ROOM!

"THAT'S NOT FAIR!" CORNELIA THINKS, AVOIDING A FIGHT AND HER MOM'S GLARE.

"IT'S NOT FAIR!" AND LILIAN'S CRYING FACE TURNS INTO A SATISFIED SMIRK.

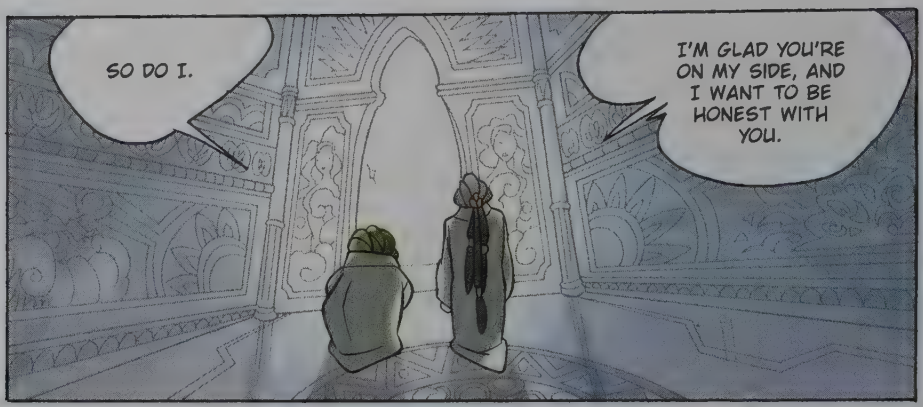
"IT'S NOT FAIR!" AND HER FATHER DOESN'T SEEM TO NOTICE, DISTRACTED BY COMPLICATED WORK STUFF.

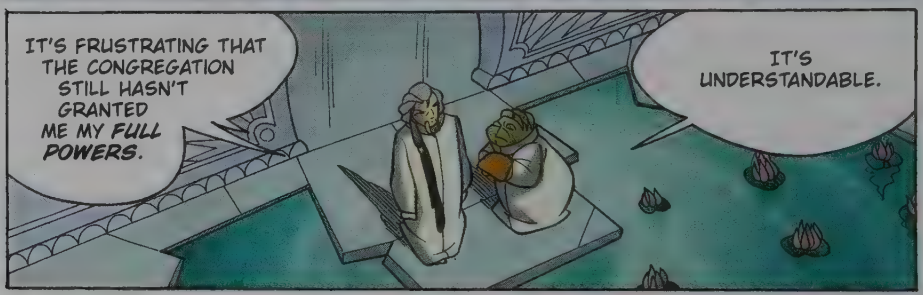
FOR A MOMENT, THE GUARDIAN FEELS SO **ALONE** IN THAT CROWDED HOUSE.

ALONE IN AN OCEAN OF UNPLEASANT, CONTRASTING FEELINGS.

ALONE! AS HER ROOM BECOMES HER SAFE HAVEN, AWAY FROM THE WORLD.

BUT AWAY FROM THE WORLD, FAR AWAY, IN KANDRAKAR, BEYOND SPACE AND TIME...
...SOMEONE WATCHES HER WITH INTEREST.
WONDERFUL!
THE POWER FLOWING THROUGH THIS BODY IS ALMOST UNLIMITED.
I CAN OBSERVE THE GUARDIANS' LIVES WHENEVER I WANT. I JUST NEED TO WISH FOR SOMETHING TO...
WISE ENDARNO...
AH, VAAL!
COME IN, MY FAITHFUL ADVISER. I HOPE SOON YOU CAN SIMPLY CALL ME ORACLE.


SO DO I.
I'M GLAD YOU'RE ON MY SIDE, AND I WANT TO BE HONEST WITH YOU.


IT'S FRUSTRATING THAT THE CONGREGATION STILL HASN'T GRANTED ME MY *FULL POWERS*.
IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE.

TRUE. AFTER ALL, CHANGING KANDRAKAR'S APPEARANCE, I COULDN'T EXPECT ...
...TO CHANGE ITS INHABITANTS TOO.
YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT YAN LIN AND TIBOR IN PARTICULAR, RIGHT?
I'M TALKING ABOUT ALL THOSE WHO INSIST ON KEEPING AN EYE ON ME, DELAYING MY OFFICIAL DESIGNATION.
AFTER I BATHE IN THE *SPRING OF SILENCE*, A LOT WILL CHANGE AROUND HERE.

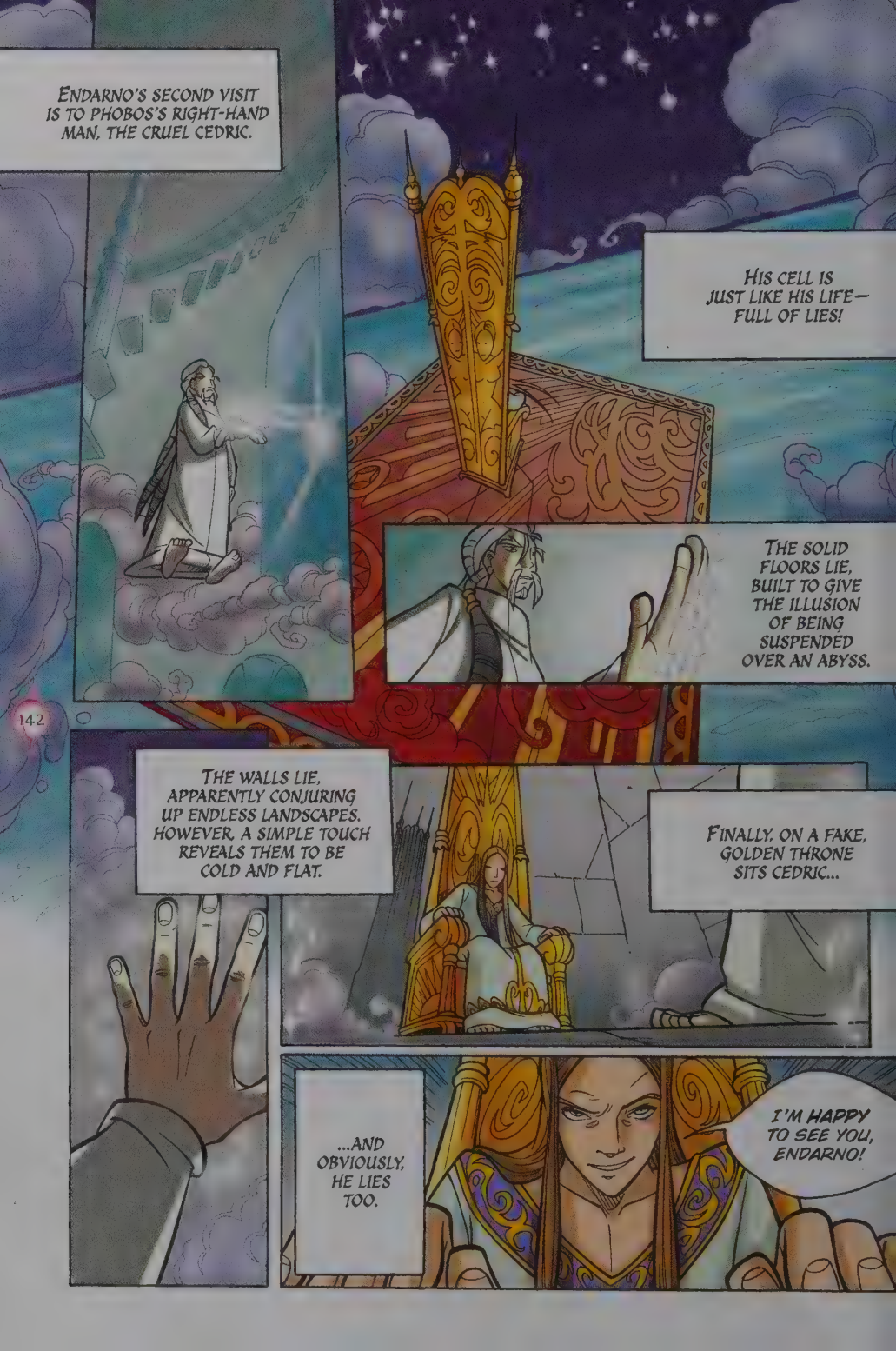
BUT LET'S NOT WASTE TIME. LET'S LEAVE THE ROOM OF QUIET AND HEAD...
...TO THE STORM ROOM!
T-CHACK
AH!
MPF!
AGH!
JARINA AND MORIANGE, WARRIOR PRINCESSES FROM THE REBORN WORLDS. TWO NEW CANDIDATES I PERSONALLY SELECTED.
TRULY BEAUTIFUL AND SKILLED. WELL DONE!

IF THEY PROVE THEMSELVES WORTHY, I'M SURE THEY'LL BECOME EXCELLENT *GUARDIANS*.
PROVIDING THE CURRENT CUSTODIAN OF THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR GIVES UP HER ROLE.
DON'T WORRY. WILL IS GOING TO *REALIZE* SHE CAN'T HANDLE THE JEWEL'S POWER ANYMORE.
...UNLIKE ON THE WORLDS WHERE I SELECTED OUR CANDIDATES.
FOR THEM, HAVING A DAUGHTER AS A GUARDIAN IS AN HONOR AND A PRIVILEGE.
I SEE THE GIRLS ARE GIVING IT THEIR ALL. GOOD!
BESIDES, MY PREDECESSOR'S TRUE MISTAKE WAS CHOOSING YOUNG GIRLS.
AND IN HEATHERFIELD, PEOPLE COMPLETELY IGNORE OUR AND THE GUARDIANS' EXISTENCE ...
ACTUALLY, I SEE THEIR FAMILIES CHEERING FROM THE BLEACHERS.
THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN SOME GOOD OLD COMPETITION TO STRENGTHEN THE *NEW TEAM*.

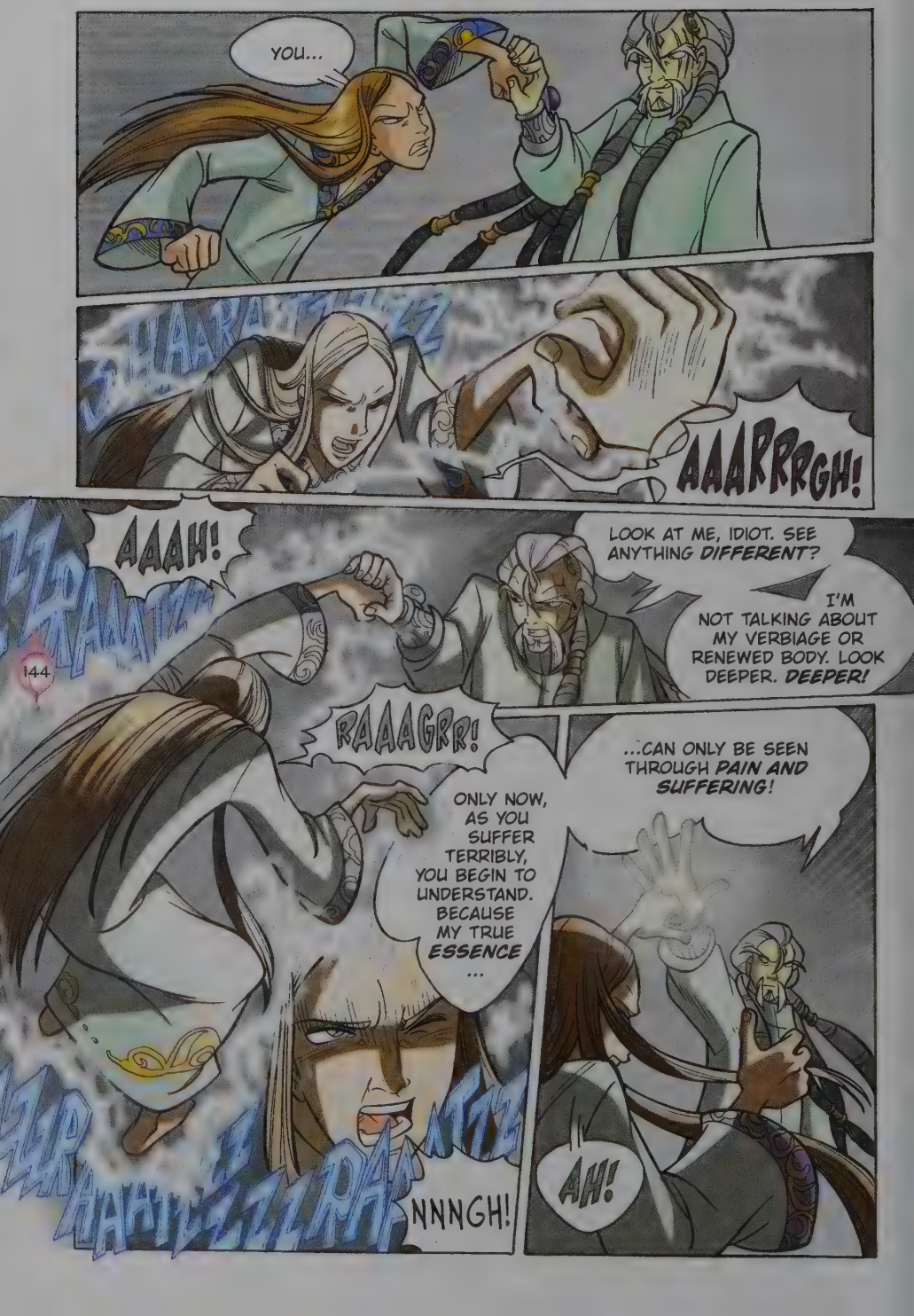
WHO ARE THOSE MYSTERIOUS CREATURES NEXT TO THE FAMILIES?
THEY'RE THE WHITE HERALDS, MY LORD.
YOU SHOULD KNOW. YOU ENCOURAGED THEIR CREATION YOURSELF A LONG TIME AGO.
OH YES. NOW I REMEMBER.
FORGIVE ME. MY MEMORY IS STILL SUFFERING THE EFFECTS OF THE PURIFICATION PROCESS.
NO NEED TO APOLOGIZE.
THE CONGREGATION WERE RELUCTANT TO ALLOW MORTAL CREATURES INTO KANDRAKAR.
AND YOU SUGGESTED THE HERALDS SHOULD ACT AS CHAPERONES.
YES. EACH HERALD GUARANTEES THE MORAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY OF THE GUEST HE ACCOMPANIES.
I UNDERSTAND. HE ACTS AS A GUIDE IN THE DIFFICULT DIMENSIONAL JOURNEY TO AND FROM THE FORTRESS.
WELL DONE, VAAL. SINCE YOU'RE SO EFFICIENT, GIVE ME THE KEY TO THE TOWER OF MISTS.
?

DO YOU WISH TO VISIT THE PRISONERS, MY LORD?
I WANT TO BID THEM FAREWELL, EVEN IF I HAVEN'T BEEN OFFICIALLY APPOINTED YET.
ONCE I BECOME ORACLE, I WON'T NEED ANY KEYS TO OPEN THE DOORS OF KANDRAKAR.
WHILE YOU, MY FAITHFUL ASSISTANT, MAY HAVE THE HONOR OF USING THIS ONE.
YOU WANT TO ASSIGN ME THE ROLE OF CUSTODIAN, WHICH WAS ONCE YOURS!
THAT'S THE PLAN. NOW LEAVE ME ALONE, PLEASE.
I HAVE TO PAY SOME VISITS.
SATISFIED, ENDARNO WALKS ALONG A PATHWAY OF SILK THROUGH THE ETERNAL CLOUDS.
YOUR WORDS FILL ME WITH PRIDE AND JOY.

ONCE IN FRONT OF THE SMOOTH WALL OF THE TOWER OF MISTS, ENDARNO ACTIVATES THE KEY BRACELET...
...AT THE MOMENT, HIS ONLY MEANS TO GET IN OR OUT OF KANDRAKAR'S INVIOLABLE PRISON.
THE EX-CUSTODIAN'S FIRST VISIT IS TO PHOBOS, ELYON'S BROTHER, EVIL TYRANT OF MERIDIAN.
HIS PRIVATE CELL IS A CHAOTIC PLACE, CONSTANTLY CHANGING ITS APPEARANCE...
141
...SPECIALLY CREATED FOR ONE ARROGANT ENOUGHT TO DOMINATE AN ENTIRE WORLD!
HEAD BOWED. EYES DEAD. THE PRISONER IS BUT A SHADOW OF THE MAN HE WAS.


ENDARNO'S SECOND VISIT IS TO PHOBOS'S RIGHT-HAND MAN, THE CRUEL CEDRIC.
HIS CELL IS JUST LIKE HIS LIFE— FULL OF LIES!
THE SOLID FLOORS LIE, BUILT TO GIVE THE ILLUSION OF BEING SUSPENDED OVER AN ABYSS.
THE WALLS LIE, APPARENTLY CONJURING UP ENDLESS LANDSCAPES. HOWEVER, A SIMPLE TOUCH REVEALS THEM TO BE COLD AND FLAT.
FINALLY, ON A FAKE, GOLDEN THRONE SITS CEDRIC...
...AND OBVIOUSLY, HE LIES TOO.
I'M HAPPY TO SEE YOU, ENDARNO!

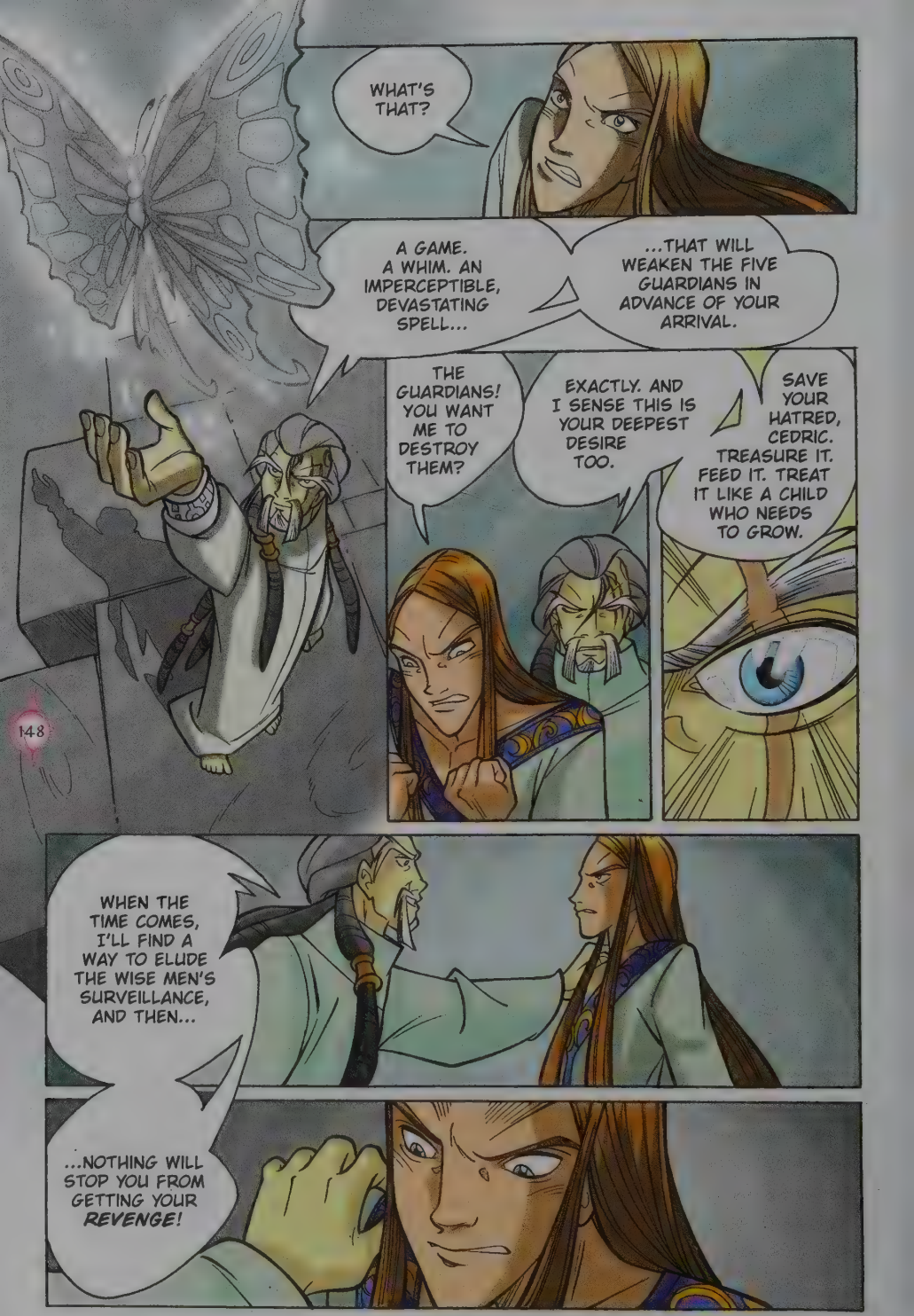
I SEE THE TOWER OF MISTS HASN'T BROKEN YOU. YOU'RE *COCKY* AS EVER.
HOW DIRECT. STRANGE, COMING FROM A WISE MAN OF KANDRAKAR.
YOU DON'T USUALLY TALK LIKE THAT. YOU USE LONG, COMPLICATED WORDS TO SAY EVEN THE SIMPLEST THING.
HA-HA-HA! YOU'RE RIGHT. WE'RE REALLY BORING.
DO I MAKE YOU LAUGH?
A LOT. YOU WANT TO *HIT* ME, DON'T YOU?
WHAT?
FROM NOW ON, THE SPELL THAT STOPS YOU FROM CHOKING ME IS BROKEN. HAPPY?
IT'S A TEST, ISN'T IT? DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE SO CRUEL.
AND I DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE SO DISTRUSTFUL ...
...OR *COWARDLY!*


YOU...
AAARRRGH!
AAAH!
LOOK AT ME, IDIOT. SEE ANYTHING DIFFERENT?
I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT MY VERBIAGE OR RENEWED BODY. LOOK DEEPER. DEEPER!
RAAAGRR!
ONLY NOW, AS YOU SUFFER TERRIBLY, YOU BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND. BECAUSE MY TRUE ESSENCE ...
...CAN ONLY BE SEEN THROUGH PAIN AND SUFFERING!
AH!
NNNGH!

TH-THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! Y-YOU...YOU CAN'T BE...
...PHOBOS?
YOU FINALLY GET IT. I FEARED I'D HAVE TO KILL YOU TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND.
OH, MY LORD! F-FORGIVE ME! YOU'RE SO... SO...
AND SOON I WILL BE MUCH MORE THAN THIS!
I... DON'T GET IT. HOW CAN YOU BE HERE? IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO ESCAPE THE TOWER OF MISTS!
DIFFERENT? I WOULD SAY POWERFUL! YES, THAT'S THE RIGHT WORD.
OH, BUT I DIDN'T ESCAPE. MY BODY IS IN A LOCKED CELL.
?

"AFTER BEING IMPRISONED, I WAS DRAINED OF ALMOST ALL MY MAGICAL STRENGTH.
"IN TIME, I LEARNED TO FEED OFF MY HATRED AND RESENTMENT. I SAVED MY RESIDUAL ENERGY AND NOURISHED IT...
"...AND IN THE DARKNESS OF MY HEART, I FOUND A SPARK OF *POWER*!
"I TRICKED THE REAL ENDARNO INTO APPROACHING ME. I MANAGED TO LOOK HIM IN THE *EYES*...THEN...
SHAAATZZZ
"...THEN I STARTED SEEING THROUGH *HIS*!"

A MIND TRANSFER!
EVERY NOW AND THEN, I HAVE TO VISIT HIS CELL TO RENEW THE SPELL THAT PARALYZES HIM.
HOW DID YOU FOOL THE WISE MEN OF KANDRAKAR ...?
IT WAS EASY. I CAN SEE ALMOST ALL OF ENDARNO'S MEMORIES. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW DISTANT EVENTS I DON'T KNOW.
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? SET ME FREE! LET'S TEACH THOSE OLD RELICS A LESSON !!
NOT YET. FIRST, I HAVE TO OFFICIALLY BECOME THE NEW ORACLE.
SOMETHING LIKE THAT. NOW I LIVE IN ENDARNO'S BODY, AND HE LIVES IN MINE.
THEN LET ME ESCAPE!
YOU WOULD BE NOTICED IF I SENT YOU OUT OF KANDRAKAR. SO I'LL HAVE TO SEND SOMETHING SMALLER!
ACTUALLY, I PLAN TO SEND YOU TO EARTH. BUT THE WISE MEN WATCH MY EVERY MOVE.


WHAT'S THAT?
A GAME. A WHIM. AN IMPERCEPTIBLE, DEVASTATING SPELL...
...THAT WILL WEAKEN THE FIVE GUARDIANS IN ADVANCE OF YOUR ARRIVAL.
THE GUARDIANS! YOU WANT ME TO DESTROY THEM?
EXACTLY. AND I SENSE THIS IS YOUR DEEPEST DESIRE TOO.
SAVE YOUR HATRED, CEDRIC. TREASURE IT. FEED IT. TREAT IT LIKE A CHILD WHO NEEDS TO GROW.
WHEN THE TIME COMES, I'LL FIND A WAY TO ELUDE THE WISE MEN'S SURVEILLANCE, AND THEN...
...NOTHING WILL STOP YOU FROM GETTING YOUR *REVENGE*!

EARLY MORNING IN HEATHERFIELD. EVERYDAY LIFE—OR BETTER STILL, THE LIFE OF THE DAY AFTER...
...THAT IS, THE DAY AFTER COMMUNITY SERVICE AND THE EXHAUSTING TRUDGING THROUGH THE CITY MUSEUM.
I SWEAR, IT WAS AWFUL!
EXPLAINING SCULPTURE FROM 1100 A.D. TO TWENTY-SIX WILD CHILDREN WAS SHATTERING.
DON'T EXAGGERATE, HAY LIN.
BUT IT'S TRUE, TARANEE. I EVEN CONSIDERED USING MY POWERS TO SHUT THEM UP.
GOOD THING YOU DIDN'T!
THE NEW ORACLE WILL COME DOWN ON US LIKE A TON OF BRICKS IF WE STEP OUT OF LINE.
BY THE WAY, AFTER SCHOOL, WE SHOULD MEET UP TO TALK ABOUT ENDARNO.
HMMM... SURE, WILL. LATER, LATER.

WHAT'S UP WITH HER?
DON'T YOU SEE? SHE'S GOING AFTER MARTIN.
THAT'S MY POINT. USUALLY, HE'S THE ONE FOLLOWING HER.
AFTER THE MESS OUR ASTRAL DROPS MADE, NOTHING'S LIKE IT USED TO BE.
HEY, MARTIN! HOLD UP. YOU CAN'T KEEP IGNORING ME!
YES I CAN, IRMA. I'M TIRED OF ALL THIS HOT AND COLD.
150
ONE MOMENT YOU'RE ALL NICE, THEN YOU BLOW ME OFF! I'VE GOT A HEART TOO, YOU KNOW?
ARE YOU TELLING ME YOU STILL LIKE ME?
I-I NEVER SAID THAT... BUT I'D BEEN TRYING TO MAKE YOU SEE IT FOR A WHILE!
OKAY. I PROMISE I WON'T SEND MIXED SIGNALS ANYMORE. BUT SWEAR THAT NOTHING'S GONNA CHANGE BETWEEN US!

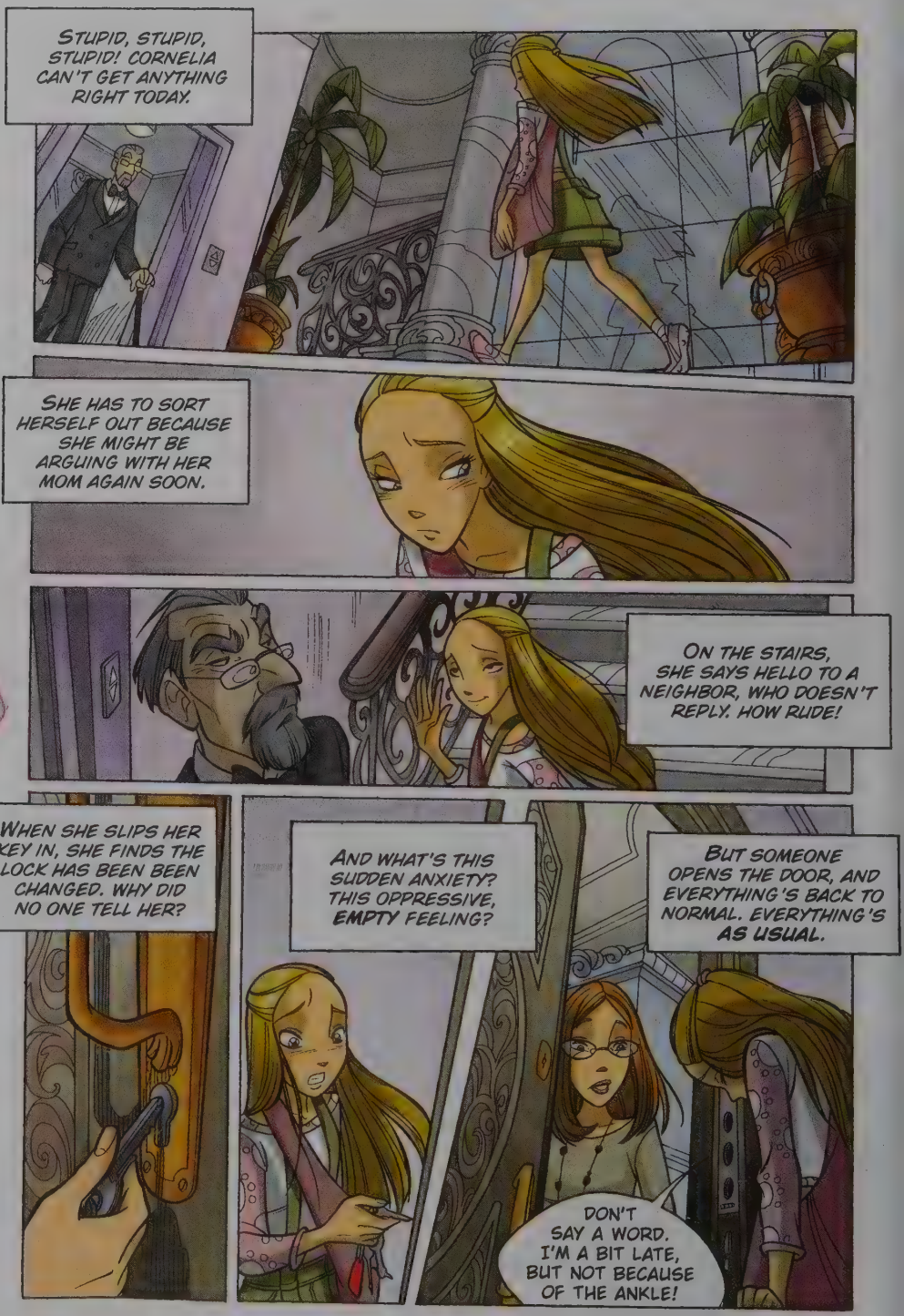
YOU MEAN THAT FROM NOW ON WE'LL *JUST* BE FRIENDS?
I'M SAYING WE'LL *ALWAYS* BE FRIENDS. ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?
HMM...
AND IN YOUR PERSONAL AND DUBIOUS VALUE SYSTEM, WHAT'S MY PLACE?
LET'S SEE... AMONG MY *MANY* GUY FRIENDS...
...YOU'RE THE *FIRST AND ONLY* ONE ON THE LIST!
HEY!
THEN I'VE STILL GOT A *CHANCE!*
MARTIN...
TONIGHT I'M PLAYING WITH MY BAND, THE *HAPPY PLANTIGRADES!* WANNA COME WITH ME?
NOW DON'T GET *CARRIED AWAY!*

MARTIN AND IRMA ARE FRIENDS AGAIN. WHAT A HEARTWARMING SCENE.
WHY THAT TONE, CORNELIA? GOT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT TODAY?
NO, ON THE BANDAGED FOOT! I HURT MY ANKLE YESTERDAY.
I'LL SPARE YOU MY MOM'S HYSTERICS. AND LILIAN WAS MORE ANNOYING THAN USUAL.
THAT'S WHAT LITTLE SISTERS ARE DESIGNED TO DO.
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY. YOU'RE AN ONLY CHILD!
YOU THINK I'M HAPPY ABOUT THAT?
NO, BUT SOMETIMES I ENVY YOU.
CORNELIA ISN'T SERIOUS, BUT SHE KNOWS SHE SHOULD NEVER SAY SUCH THINGS, EVEN AS A JOKE.

On the other side of town, in the guardian's flat, the door of the balcony bursts open...
SBAM
A small crystal butterfly appears out of nowhere and gently settles on a plant...
...incinerating it!
153
Then, the little creature flies undisturbed into the empty house.
It brushes every item, touches every photograph, and finds everything related to Cornelia...
...magically ERASING any vital trace of the guardian!

LATER, AFTER SCHOOL.
C'MON, CORNY. WHAT'S UP WITH YOU?
YOU'VE BEEN IGNORING ME THE WHOLE WAY. I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE WALKED HOME ALONE.
SORRY. I'M MENTALLY ORGANIZING MY DAY.
THIS AFTERNOON, WE HAVE TO MEET UP AT OUR HEAD-QUARTERS, RIGHT?
WHY?
LET ME REMIND YOU OF THE TWO TOPICS OF THE DAY. THE FIRST IS ENDARNO. THE SECOND IS OUR EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.
WE CAN'T ALWAYS USE THEM AS AN EXCUSE TO GET AWAY NOW THAT THE ASTRAL DROPS ARE GONE.
I MEANT I DON'T SEE WHY WE SHOULD MEET AT MS. RUDOLPH'S HOUSE.
IT'S NOT LIKE WE'VE GOTTA INVOLVE ORUBE IN EVERY-THING WE DO.

WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT SHE'LL THINK ABOUT THE NEW ORACLE, AND...
BULL!
P-PARDON ME?
YOU HEARD ME. THE TRUTH IS, YOU'RE AFRAID OF FACING HER...
...ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU TWO ARGUED ABOUT MATT.
ALWAYS THE KNOW-IT-ALL, HUH? ALWAYS SO CONFIDENT!
SURE! AM I NOT THE PRAGMATIC CUSTODIAN OF THE POWER OF EARTH?
WHERE ARE YOU GOING? DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE OFFENDED JUST BECAUSE I WAS HONEST!
THE POINT IS THAT, AS USUAL, YOU DID IT THE WRONG WAY! SEE YA!


STUPID, STUPID, STUPID! CORNELIA CAN'T GET ANYTHING RIGHT TODAY.
SHE HAS TO SORT HERSELF OUT BECAUSE SHE MIGHT BE ARGUING WITH HER MOM AGAIN SOON.
ON THE STAIRS, SHE SAYS HELLO TO A NEIGHBOR, WHO DOESN'T REPLY. HOW RUDE!
WHEN SHE SLIPS HER KEY IN, SHE FINDS THE LOCK HAS BEEN BEEN CHANGED. WHY DID NO ONE TELL HER?
AND WHAT'S THIS SUDDEN ANXIETY? THIS OPPRESSIVE, EMPTY FEELING?
BUT SOMEONE OPENS THE DOOR, AND EVERYTHING'S BACK TO NORMAL. EVERYTHING'S AS USUAL.
DON'T SAY A WORD. I'M A BIT LATE, BUT NOT BECAUSE OF THE ANKLE!

I JUST STOPPED TO TALK TO WILL AND...
S-SORRY, DEAR, BUT...
...WHO ARE YOU?
?
WHAT'S GOING ON, ELIZABETH? WHO'S THIS GIRL?
I'VE NO IDEA, HAROLD. SHE JUST WALKED IN, AND I...
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT? IS THIS A JOKE?
WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT? I'M TIRED AND DON'T FEEL LIKE PLAYING!
MOMMY...
DON'T WORRY, LILIAN.
A NATURAL, PROTECTIVE GESTURE. WHY DOES HER MOM SHIELD HER LITTLE SISTER? WHY? WHO IS SHE AFRAID OF?

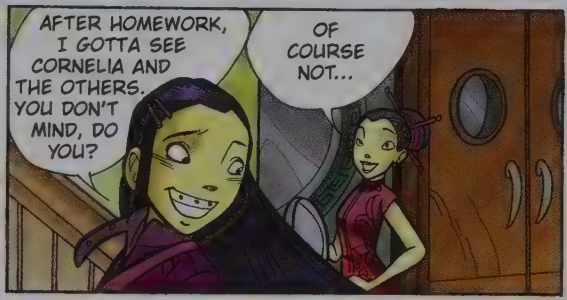
WHAT'S HAPPENING, CORNELIA? WHY IS DAD SO TENSE? WHY DOESN'T HE WANT YOU TO GO INTO YOUR...
...ROOM?
M-MOM! DAD! WHERE... WHERE ARE MY THINGS? MY BED? MY WARDROBE?
I'M SORRY, DEAR. THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN MY OFFICE, AND WE...
...WE ONLY HAVE ONE DAUGHTER!
"LILIAN!"
ONLY NOW, SEEING THE CONFUSION AND ANGUISH IN HIS EYES, DOES CORNELIA UNDERSTAND!

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE, PRAGMATIC GUARDIAN, WHEN YOUR OWN ELEMENT CRUMBLES BENEATH YOUR FEET?
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FIND OUT YOU NEVER EXISTED?
ALL YOUR CERTAINTIES TURN TO SAND WHILE HARSH REALITY REPLACES MAGIC.
CAT WORLD
159
THAT MAGIC THAT, NOW MORE THAN EVER, IS JUST A FLIGHT OF LIGHTNESS.
THE CRUEL FLIGHT OF A BUTTERFLY THAT ONLY NEEDED TO FLUTTER ITS WINGS...
...TO ERASE A WHOLE EXISTENCE!
UNIMAGINABLE.

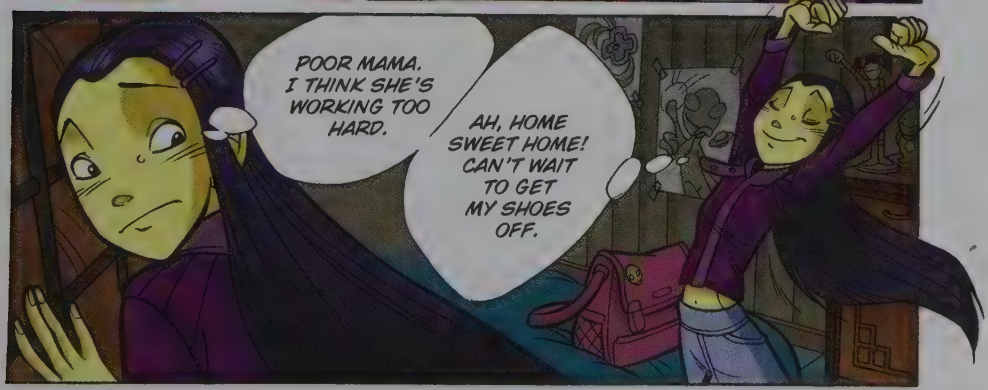
Witch
Will
Irma
Taranee
Cornelia
Hay Lin

HI, HAY LIN.
HI, MAMA. HI, PAPA! CUSTOMERS STILL HERE?

A GROUP OF LATECOMERS. I'M AFRAID WE'LL HAVE TO EAT LATE TOO.
NO WORRIES. I'LL GO TO MY ROOM.


AFTER HOMEWORK, I GOTTA SEE CORNELIA AND THE OTHERS. YOU DON'T MIND, DO YOU?
OF COURSE NOT...

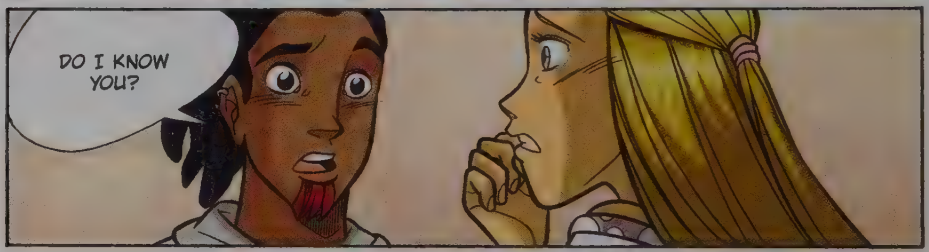
...BUT WHO IS CORNELIA? A NEW FRIEND OF YOURS?
?

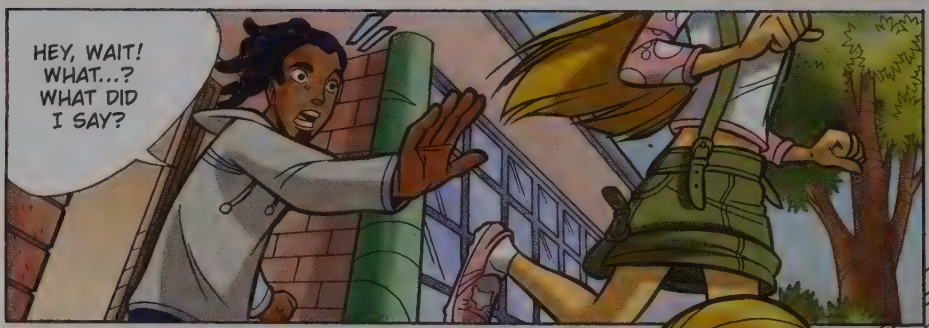

POOR MAMA. I THINK SHE'S WORKING TOO HARD.
AH, HOME SWEET HOME! CAN'T WAIT TO GET MY SHOES OFF.

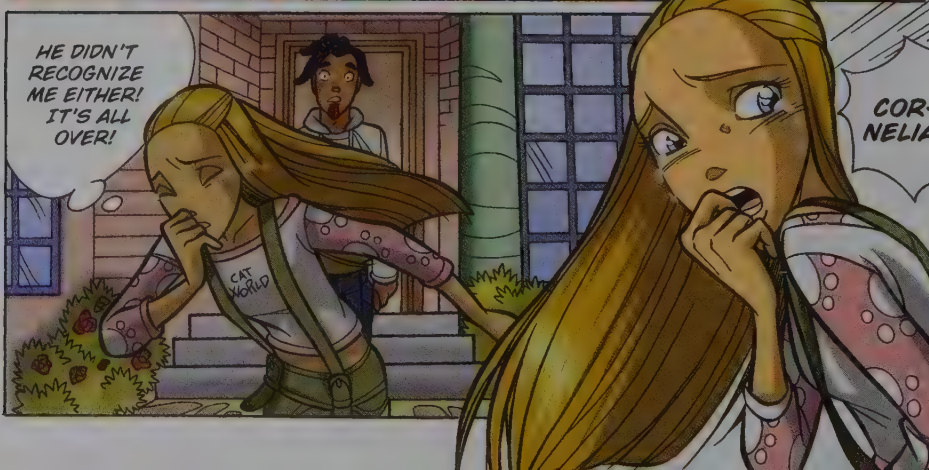
FRUMP
STUMP
TUD
?
THERE'S SOMETHING MOVING IN MY DRAWER!
WHAT...?
TH-THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
POWER KID
SBRAAAM
Hisssss!

IT'S A MINIATURE DRAGON—AND IT DOESN'T LOOK TOO FRIENDLY!
SNORT
YIKES! IT'S GETTING CLOSER! WHADDAIDOWHADDAI-DOWHADDAIDO?
Hisssss
S-STAY AWAY...UM... YOU CRITTER! I DON'T WANNA HURT YOU.
SNORT
O-OH! WHAT'S IT DOING? WHY'S IT OPENING ITS MOUTH?
THE SILVER DRAGON SLOWLY OPENS ITS MOUTH. TO TALK... OR TO BITE?
WE'LL FIND OUT LATER, BECAUSE NOW WE'VE GOT SOMEPLACE ELSE TO BE.
TUMP
TUMP

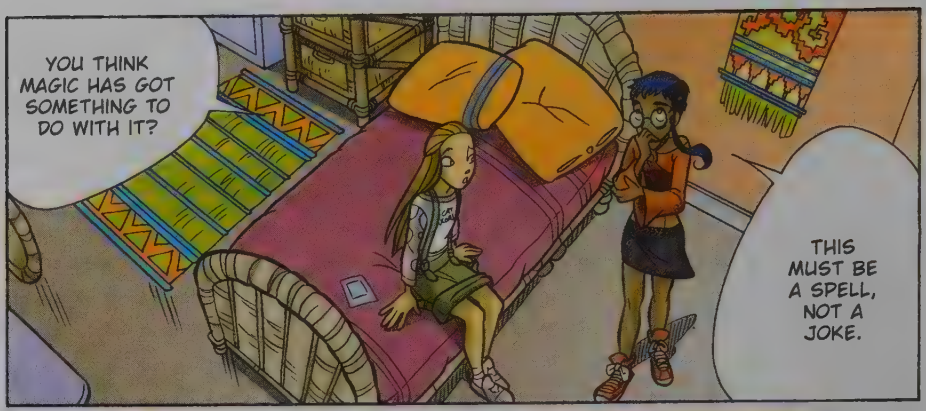
PLEASE LET HER RECOGNIZE ME. PLEASE LET HER RECOGNIZE ME!
YES?
P-PETER?

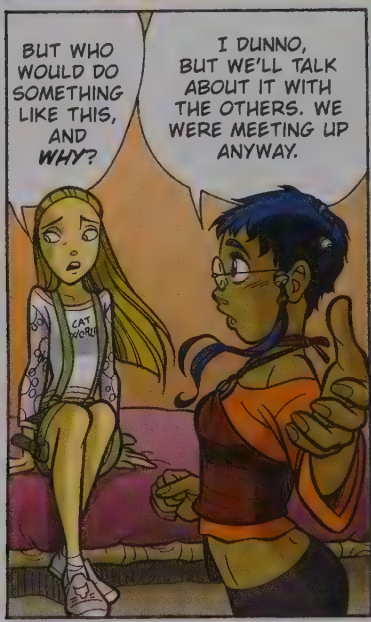

DO I KNOW YOU?

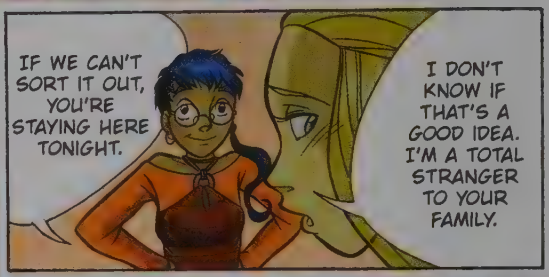

HEY, WAIT! WHAT...? WHAT DID I SAY?


HE DIDN'T RECOGNIZE ME EITHER! IT'S ALL OVER!
COR-NELIA!
CAT WORLD

OH, TARANEE! TARANEE! YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
OF COURSE! YOU MUST'VE CRIED A LOT, BUT YOU'RE STILL RECOGNIZABLE!
I D-DIDN'T KNOW WHERE TO GO! I COULDN'T FIND WILL AND YOU WERE THE CLOSEST AND...
HEY, HEY! THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU. COME IN!
"WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT IN MY ROOM..."
UNBELIEV-ABLE!
I CAN'T FIND ANYTHING ABOUT YOU. YOU'VE EVEN DISAPPEARED FROM THE HALLOWEEN PHOTO!
YOU WERE SAYING THAT, FOR YOUR PARENTS, IT'S LIKE YOU NEVER EXISTED?
NOT JUST THEM... EVERYONE— ACQUAINTANCES, FRIENDS...
BUT YOU RECOGNIZED ME RIGHT AWAY, DIDN'T YOU?
OF COURSE! MAYBE BECAUSE I'M MAGICAL LIKE YOU.

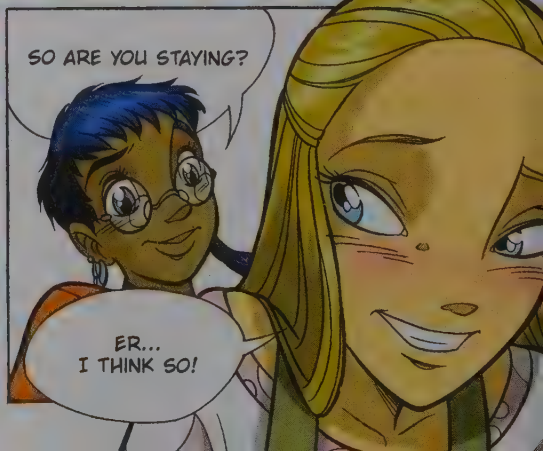

YOU THINK MAGIC HAS GOT SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT?
THIS MUST BE A SPELL, NOT A JOKE.


BUT WHO WOULD DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS, AND WHY?
I DUNNO, BUT WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT WITH THE OTHERS. WE WERE MEETING UP ANYWAY.


IF WE CAN'T SORT IT OUT, YOU'RE STAYING HERE TONIGHT.
I DON'T KNOW IF THAT'S A GOOD IDEA. I'M A TOTAL STRANGER TO YOUR FAMILY.

THEN I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO EVERYONE!
MAY I?

I BROUGHT THESE. MADE WITH MY OWN TWO HANDS. I'LL LEAVE THEM AND GO, OKAY? BYE!


SO ARE YOU STAYING?
ER... I THINK SO!

LATER, AT REBECCA RUDOLPH'S (A.K.A. ORUBE'S) HOUSE...
LOOKS LIKE I'M THE FIRST. CAN I COME IN?
OF COURSE. IT'S YOUR HOUSE.
I THOUGHT WE'D SORTED THINGS OUT, RIGHT?
WHADDAYA MEAN?
YOU KNOW WHAT. MAYBE WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT YOU, ME, AND MATT.
TALK ALL YOU WANT. I'M NOT GONNA LISTEN.
I'LL JUST SAY ONCE AGAIN THAT I FEEL NOTHING FOR HIM. HE'S ONLY A FRIEND.
REALLY? GOOD. ME TOO.
THEIR TALK ENDS A BIT ICILY... WHO KNOWS IF THE GIRLS ARE BEING SINCERE ...?

WILL IS STILL IN LOVE WITH MATT, AND ORUBE FEELS SOMETHING FOR HIM TOO.
IN HER CASE, IT'S NOT LOVE BUT SIMPLE GRATITUDE.
THANKS TO MATT AND HIS KINDNESS, NOW ORUBE FEELS A LITTLE LESS ALONE AND A LITTLE LESS...ALIEN.
LATER, THE OTHER GUARDIANS ARRIVE, AND THE DISCUSSION SHIFTS TO WHAT'S HAPPENED TO CORNELIA.
CAT WORLD
SHE'S BARELY LISTENING. SHE JUST LOOKS AT HER FRIENDS, RELIEVED TO HAVE FOUND HER LIFELINE.
YES, THERE THEY ARE. ALL HER CERTAINTIES.

STEP ASIDE. I HAVE HOT NEWS!
HAY-HAY! YOU GET HERE LATE AND DON'T EVEN WANNA KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO CORNY?
I ALREADY KNOW, IRMA. I EVEN KNOW WHO THE CULPRIT IS!
35
THIS GUY!
A CRYSTAL BUTTER-FLY?
IT LOOKS ALIVE!
DON'T BE FOOLED. IT'S DANGEROUS!
IT'S GOT A BROKEN WING. POOR THING!
IT LOOKS SO CUTE!
THAT'S RIGHT, LOOKS! LISTEN TO WHAT HAPPENED TO ME THIS AFTERNOON...

"IT ALL STARTED WITH A LITTLE DRAGON WITH ITS MOUTH OPEN...
WHAT'S THAT BETWEEN ITS TEETH? LOOKS LIKE A BUTTERFLY...
SNORT
WOOOSH
HEY! SOMEONE'S GRUMPY!
IT JUST WANTS TO STOP YOU FROM TOUCHING THAT BUTTERFLY, HAY LIN.
GRANDMA!
WHAT'S UP? IF YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, WHY DIDN'T YOU CALL ME TO KANDRAKAR?
BECAUSE I SUSPECT THAT EVIL LITTLE CREATURE COMES FROM THERE!
?

IT CARRIES A SOPHISTICATED SPELL THAT ONLY SOMEONE VERY POWERFUL COULD HAVE CONJURED UP.
IT WAS IN YOUR DRAWER BECAUSE IT WAS ERASING ANY MEMORIES CONNECTED TO CORNELIA!
I DON'T GET IT!
THE REASON IS AS MYSTERIOUS AS THE IDENTITY OF ITS CREATOR, BUT I THINK HE'S IN KANDRAKAR.
TO GET PROOF, YOU'LL HAVE TO BRING IT NEAR THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR. IF THERE'S A REACTION...
...THEN THE HEART WILL GIVE CORNELIA A CHANCE TO GET HER MEMORIES AND HER LIFE BACK!
I HAVE TO GO. THIS CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION MIGHT BE UNDER SURVEILLANCE.
WAIT! YOU STILL HAVEN'T TOLD ME...

...WHO'S THE DRAGON?
OH, IT'S JUST A SENTINEL. IT'S BEEN PROTECTING OUR FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS.
THANK IT, MY DEAR GRANDDAUGHTER. THEN...
SNORT
...LET IT...
...GO BACK TO SLEEP!
THE SILVER DRAGON
THE SILVER DRAGON

THAT'S ALL. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED.
LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT A LOT TO GET DONE!
A CHANCE TO GET MY MEMORIES BACK...AND MY LIFE!
ONCE AGAIN, IT'S ALL IN YOUR HANDS, WILL.
YOU'RE WRONG, CORNELIA.
IT'S ALL...
...HERE!

CURSE YAN LIN AND CURSE HER SENTINEL!
I WAS HOPING THE BUTTERFLY WOULD COMPLETE ITS TASK...
SBAM
...SILENTLY ERASING THE LIVES OF ALL THE GUARDIANS, ONE BY ONE.
I WASN'T ASKING FOR MUCH. I JUST WANTED TO MAKE THEM FEEL DESPERATE AND INSECURE, LIKE THEIR ASTRAL DROPS DID.
BUT THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR FIRST ABSORBED THE BUTTERFLY, THEN TRANSFORMED THE GIRLS...
...TO TAKE THEM WHERE THEY MIGHT FIND AN ANSWER.

THE JEWEL MUST BE TAKING THEM WHERE I MYSELF GOT THE BUTTERFLY.
ACTUALLY, MAYBE IT'S BETTER THIS WAY. AFTER ALL, THE LEGENDARY SECRET GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE...
"...ISN'T THAT EASY TO LEAVE!"
WOOOSH
WHAT AN ICY LANDSCAPE!
DOESN'T SEEM SO COLD TO ME. WHAT'S FALLING ISN'T SNOW... LOOKS LIKE ASHES!
THEN WHY DO I FEEL ICE IN MY BONES?
LOOK OVER THERE! UNDER THAT GIANT STONE FLOWER!

THE BUTTERFLY BROKE FREE FROM THE HEART!
IT'S GETTING INSIDE THAT COCOON-LOOKING THING!
IT APPEARS TO BE A GIANT CHRYSALIS.
TRUE. AND DO YOU SEE WHAT IT'S MADE OF?
HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PHOTO-GRAPHS.
MY PHOTOGRAPHS!
MY MEMORIES!

AS SOON AS SHE TOUCHES THEM, THE PICTURES JOIN IN PAIRS, LIKE WINGS...
...THEN FLY SWIFTLY TOWARD THE GUARDIANS, SURROUNDING AND TRAPPING THEM!
FLAP
FLAP
FLAP
FRUMP FRUUUUMP
EVEN CORNELIA, FOR AN INSTANT, IS PARALYZED WITH SHOCK.
177
FROM THE REMAINS OF THE CHRYSALIS EMERGES HER DOUBLE, MADE OF CRYSTAL...
...WITH A BROKEN WING!
AAAH!

THE BLINK OF AN EYE...
...A FLUTTER OF WINGS...
...AND CORNELIA FINDS HERSELF FLOATING LIKE AN INVISIBLE GHOST...
...IN HER OWN PAST!
I DON'T GET IT. THIS IS THE BALCONY OF MY HOUSE...
...AND THAT'S ME A FEW YEARS AGO!

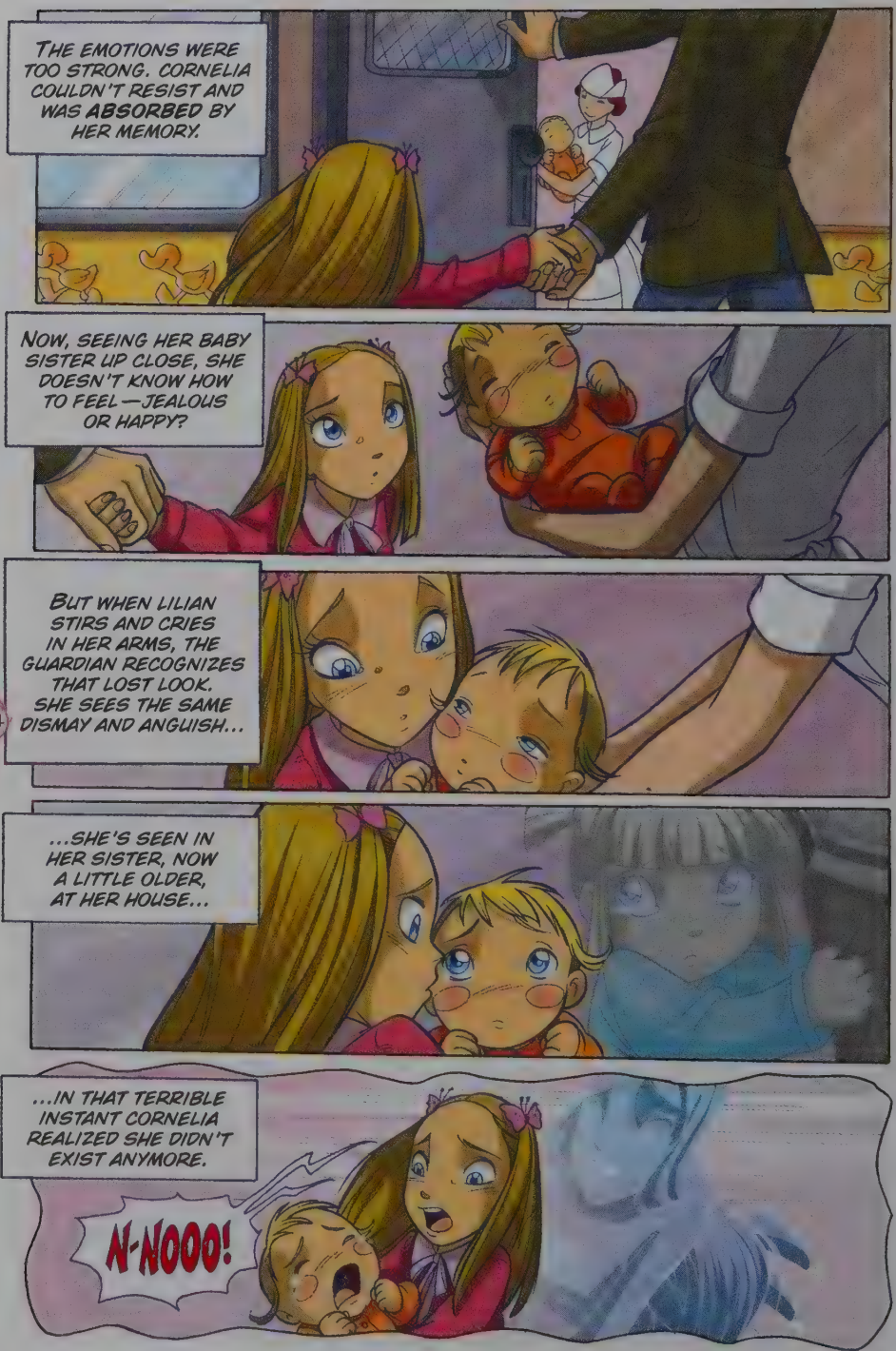
THAT PLANT... I REMEMBER! IT WAS DYING, AND I WAS SO SAD.
THAT'S WHEN I HOPED WITH ALL MY HEART IT WOULD RECOVER...
...AND DISCOVERED I WAS MAGICAL!
THERE I AM. EMOTIONAL, INCREDULOUS, STILL UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND...
BUT THIS IS JUST A MEMORY, AND I SHOULDN'T BE HERE!
Y-YES. I... HAVE TO LEAVE!

THE BLINK OF AN EYE...
...A FLUTTER OF WINGS...
...AND...
WHERE AM I? WHERE ARE MY FRIENDS?
HANG ON. THIS IS MERIDIAN, AND THAT'S...
...CALEB!
I'M RELIVING THE MOMENT I MET HIM AND STARTED LOVING HIM!

CALEB. OH, CALEB! I WISH I COULD RELIVE THIS MOMENT WITH YOU FOREVER.
B-BUT... NO. I CAN'T STAY. I DON'T WANT TO.
FORGIVE ME, BUT I FEEL I NEED TO GET AWAY FROM ALL THIS.
FAR... A-AWAY... NOW...
ONCE AGAIN, THE BLINK OF AN EYE...
...AND A FLUTTER OF WINGS!

NO. THIS TIME, I DON'T THINK I RECOGNIZE THIS PLACE. WHERE AM I?
LOOKS LIKE A HOSPITAL. BUT WHAT...?
DAD?
SEE HER? SHE'S THE THIRD FROM THE LEFT. CAN YOU SEE HER...
...CORNELIA?
YEEES! THERE SHE IS!
THAT'S MY BABY SISTER? LILIAN? AND SHE'S COMING HOME WITH US?
NOT YET, HONEY. BUT YOU CAN PLAY WITH HER SOON!
OKAY, BUT THEN WE BRING HER BACK HERE, RIGHT?

THE BLINK OF AN EYE...
...A FLUTTER OF WINGS...
...AND HER HEART BEATING SO FAST...
THAT'S WHAT CORNELIA FEELS AS SHE STOPS BEING A GHOST...
...AND STARTS SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF HER YOUNGER SELF.
YES, CORNELIA IS NO LONGER JUST WATCHING HER PAST. NOW SHE'S PART OF IT.
DAD, CAN I SEE LILIAN UP CLOSE?
SURE! COME WITH ME.


THE EMOTIONS WERE TOO STRONG. CORNELIA COULDN'T RESIST AND WAS ABSORBED BY HER MEMORY.
NOW, SEEING HER BABY SISTER UP CLOSE, SHE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO FEEL—JEALOUS OR HAPPY?
BUT WHEN LILIAN STIRS AND CRIES IN HER ARMS, THE GUARDIAN RECOGNIZES THAT LOST LOOK. SHE SEES THE SAME DISMAY AND ANGUISH...
...SHE'S SEEN IN HER SISTER, NOW A LITTLE OLDER, AT HER HOUSE...
...IN THAT TERRIBLE INSTANT CORNELIA REALIZED SHE DIDN'T EXIST ANYMORE.
N-NOOO!

NOOO! D-DON'T...
WH-WHAT...? WHERE...?
WOOOSH
Hhhhhh
CORNELIA!
GET AWAY FROM ME, WHATEVER YOU ARE!
SHAAAATZ
GO AWAY! LEAVE!
Hhhhhh
MMMGH!
KREEECK

"WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?
"WHO WAS THAT CREATURE? WAS SHE GOOD OR EVIL?
"MOST IMPORTANTLY, WHAT DID SHE WANT FROM ME?
"I DUNNO. MAYBE SHE JUST WANTED ME TO STAY HERE WITH HER...FOREVER!
"MAYBE I WOULD HAVE BECOME A CRYSTAL MEMORY TOO, TRAPPED IN A GARDEN OF ASHES.
"WHAT I KNOW IS WE WERE RIGHT TO LEAVE THAT ABANDONED, DESOLATE PLACE..."

...AND I ALSO KNOW THAT MY REAL LIFE IS HERE AND NOW IN HEATHERFIELD.
CAT WORLD
THERE'S YOUR BUILDING. WANT US TO COME UPSTAIRS WITH YOU?
THANKS, TARANEE, BUT I THINK I CAN TAKE IT FROM HERE.
DON'T ASK ME WHY, BUT I'M SURE THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR HAS ALREADY FIXED EVERYTHING.
I'M SURE THIS KEY WILL ONCE AGAIN OPEN THE DOOR.
"AS SOON AS I STEP INSIDE, MOM AND DAD WILL RECOGNIZE ME...
"...AND WILL PROBABLY YELL AT ME FOR BEING LATE."

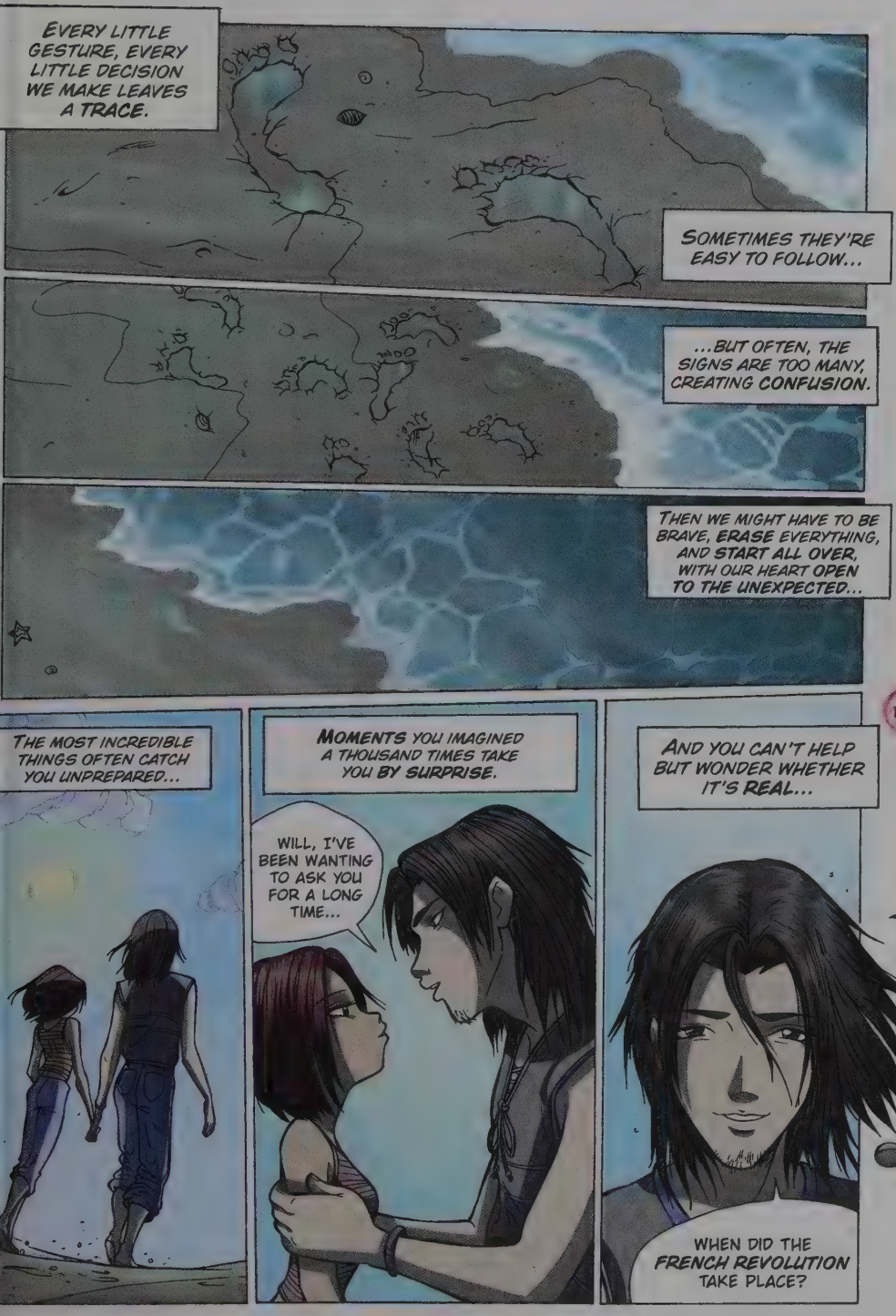
"I'M SURE I'LL HUG THEM TIGHT, THEN CRY AND LAUGH, WHICH WILL SURPRISE THEM.
"AND AS SOON AS I SEE LILIAN, I'LL THANK HER FOR HER EYES AND HER CRYING...
"...AND I'LL EVEN LET HER READ MY JOURNAL EVERY NOW AND THEN."
YES, MY FRIENDS. NOW I KNOW I WON'T BE ALONE ANY-MORE.
YOU NEVER WERE!

HMM... TOIL AND TROUBLE... THE GUARDIANS ARE BACK!
NEVER MIND. SOON THE CONGREGATION WILL DISCOVER THAT A WHITE HERALD HAS INEXPLICABLY ABANDONED HIS POST...
...CROSSING A DIMENSIONAL PORTAL, HEADED TO EARTH.
THE WISE MEN WILL NEVER KNOW THE REAL HERALD IS IN A CELL IN THE TOWER OF MISTS...
...AND THAT HIS WHITE ARMOR NOW HIDES A MAN WITH A BLACK SOUL!
YES. I WISH YOU GOOD LUCK, MY FAITHFUL CEDRIC...
...AND GOOD REVENGE!
END OF CHAPTER 39

Witch
Will
Irma
Taranee
Cornelia
Hay Lin

40

The Last Secret
"Every decision we make leaves a trace..."


EVERY LITTLE GESTURE, EVERY LITTLE DECISION WE MAKE LEAVES A TRACE.
SOMETIMES THEY'RE EASY TO FOLLOW...
...BUT OFTEN, THE SIGNS ARE TOO MANY, CREATING CONFUSION.
THEN WE MIGHT HAVE TO BE BRAVE, ERASE EVERYTHING, AND START ALL OVER, WITH OUR HEART OPEN TO THE UNEXPECTED...
THE MOST INCREDIBLE THINGS OFTEN CATCH YOU UNPREPARED...
MOMENTS YOU IMAGINED A THOUSAND TIMES TAKE YOU BY SURPRISE.
WILL, I'VE BEEN WANTING TO ASK YOU FOR A LONG TIME...
AND YOU CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHETHER IT'S REAL...
WHEN DID THE FRENCH REVOLUTION TAKE PLACE?

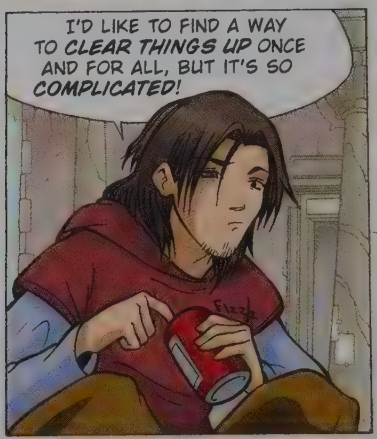
...OR JUST A DREAM!
1789 OR 1798? WILL?
HUH?
SORRY... I WAS DISTRACTED...
FALLING ASLEEP IN CLASS IS AN INDIRECT WAY OF TELLING ME HOW BORING MY LECTURE IS...
...OR A SIGN THAT YOU DIDN'T GET ENOUGH SLEEP?
WELL, ACTUALLY, YESTERDAY I WENT TO BED A BIT LATE.
194
KIDS TODAY...IF THE FRENCH HAD ACTED LIKE YOU, THERE WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN A REVOLUTION.
See? He didn't scold her THIS TIME EITHER.
HA-HA-HA!
Never a detention slip or a trip to the principal's office. With that VANDOM, lately, the prof has been...
...TOO SOFT for my liking!
CRACK

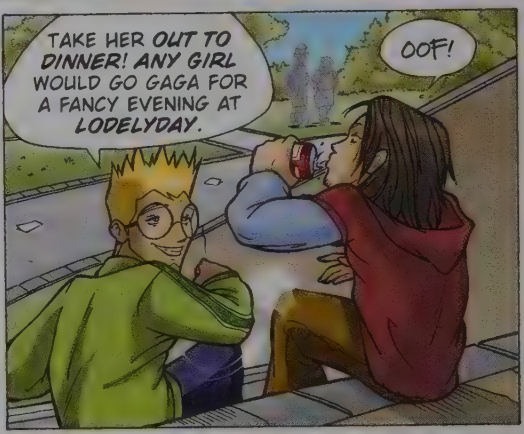
TOO SOFT!
THAT'S HOW I JUDGE MY PREDECESSOR'S BEHAVIOR, VAAL.
DOES SOMETHING IN PARTICULAR BOTHER YOU, ORACLE?
MERIDIAN, FOR EXAMPLE. I HEAR IT'S STILL GOVERNED BY THE ESCANOR DYNASTY.
YOUNG ELYON IS AN EXCELLENT QUEEN, LOVED AND RESPECTED THROUGH ALL METAMOOR, SIR.
SHE WAS THE ONE WHO ENDED THE REIGN OF TERROR AND ABUSE OF PRINCE PHOBOS.
HER BROTHER PHOBOS, DEAR VAAL.
A CLEAR CONTRADICTION, DON'T YOU THINK?
I'M AFRAID I DON'T FOLLOW, SIR...
SOON YOU'LL UNDERSTAND, AND WITH YOU, THE WHOLE CONGREGATION. I WANT TO TAKE MEASURES TO FIX THIS SITUATION.
MEASURES, ORACLE?
195

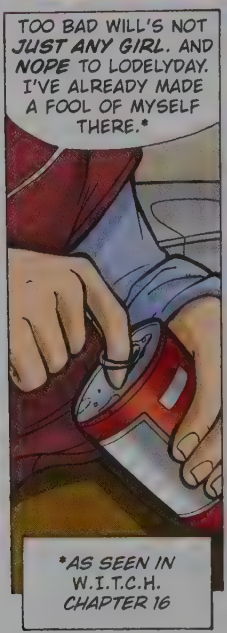
I WANT TO GIVE METAMOOR THE CHANCE TO CHOOSE WHO WILL GOVERN IT. FREE ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD.
CERTAINLY A WORTHY PROPOSITION, SIR, BUT AS I MENTIONED, THE LIGHT OF MERIDIAN...
THE LIGHT OF MERIDIAN IS A BLOOD RELATIVE OF THE CRUELEST TYRANT OF METAMOOR. THIS SHOULD BE CAUSE FOR CONCERN...
GET A WHITE HERALD READY, VAAL. TODAY, HE'LL BRING ELYON A REQUEST TO ABDICATE AND HAND OVER THE CROWN OF LIGHT.
A-AS YOU WISH, ORACLE.
IF THE YOUNG QUEEN IS AS WISE AS THEY SAY, SHE'LL RECOGNIZE THE IRREGULARITY OF HER ELECTION AND DEFER TO OUR JUDGMENT.
HER REFUSAL WOULD BE CONSIDERED A HOSTILE ACT TOWARD KANDRAKAR.
EITHER WAY, LITTLE SISTER, YOUR FUTURE WILL BE BITTER ...

SHEFFIELD INSTITUTE. THANKFULLY, IT'S RECESS!
HOT CHOCOLATE SWEETENED TO THE MAX! WILL, YOU MUST BE FEELING REALLY LOW TO DRINK THAT SO EARLY.
YOU ALWAYS KNOW HOW TO CHEER PEOPLE UP, HUH, CORNY?
CLICK
NOBODY ASKED FOR YOUR OPINION. I'M JUST TRYING TO FIND OUT WHAT'S THE MATTER!
WE ALL KNOW WHAT THE MATT-ER IS! WILL NEEDS TO TALK TO HIM.
REALLY, AGONY AUNT? I BET YOU'VE GOT ADVICE READY, SINCE YOU'RE SUCH AN EXPERT!
ADD MORE SUGAR, WILL. YOUR FRIEND'S PRETTY BITTER TODAY!
BETTER BITTER AND REALISTIC THAN MUSHY AND DREAMY!
WASTED BREATH. STICKS AND STONES!
WILL YOU STOP THAT? THINGS ARE BAD ENOUGH ALREADY!
CORNELIA'S RIGHT. I FEEL AWFUL, AND YES, IRMA...IT'S ABOUT MATT.
THE THING IS, I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT TO THINK...
THE LAST TIME WE SPOKE WAS A TOTAL DISASTER. WE JUST ATTACKED EACH OTHER...*
*AS SEEN IN W.I.T.C.H. CHAPTER 38

...AND WE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER AT ALL. A TOTAL TRAIN WRECK.
UM... WHATCHA GONNA DO NOW?


I'D LIKE TO FIND A WAY TO CLEAR THINGS UP ONCE AND FOR ALL, BUT IT'S SO COMPLICATED!

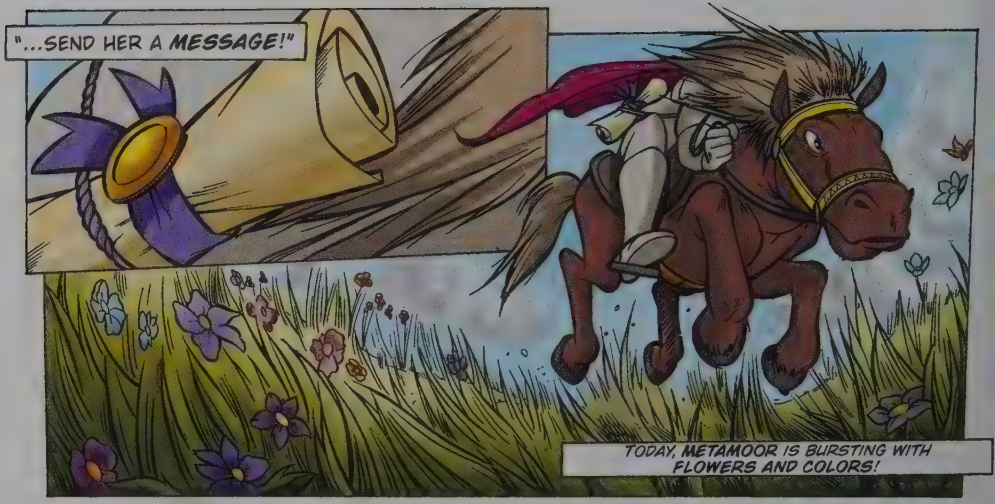

TAKE HER OUT TO DINNER! ANY GIRL WOULD GO GAGA FOR A FANCY EVENING AT LODELYDAY.
OOF!


TOO BAD WILL'S NOT JUST ANY GIRL. AND NOPE TO LODELYDAY. I'VE ALREADY MADE A FOOL OF MYSELF THERE.*
*AS SEEN IN W.I.T.C.H. CHAPTER 16

PIZZA?
BORING!
FAST FOOD?
NOT VERY ROMANTIC...
MOVIES AND POPCORN?
WHEN ARE WE GONNA TALK? PREVIEWS?

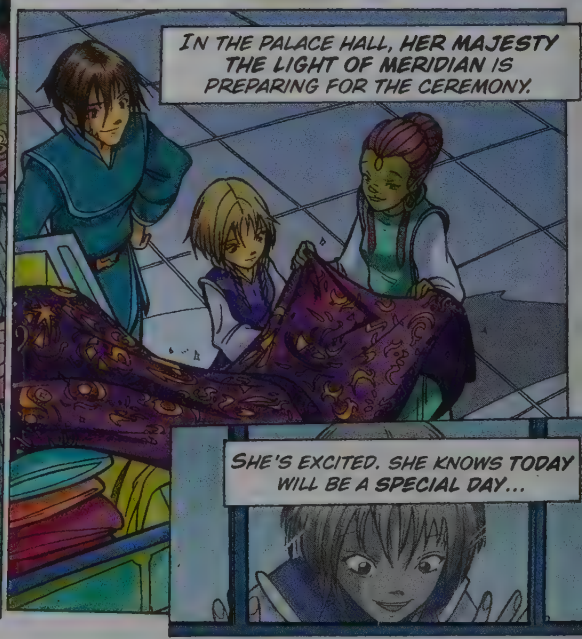
I DUNNO WHAT ELSE TO SAY, MAN. YOU'RE SO PICKY! YOU COULD INVITE HER TO OUR NEXT CONCERT AND...
YEAH, SO I'LL END UP LOSING FACE AS WELL AS WILL'S TRUST. I CAN'T FOCUS MUCH ON MUSIC LATELY.

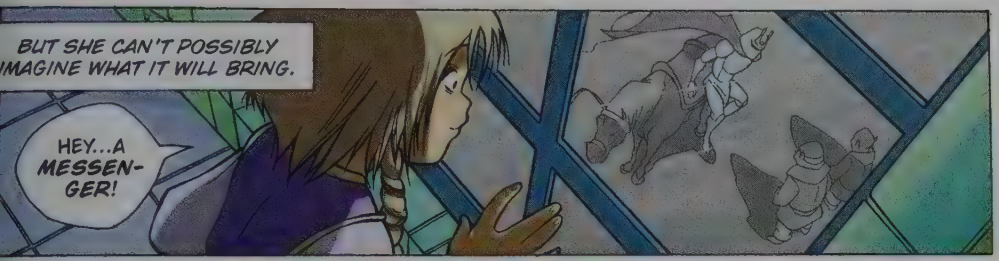
HUH? HANG ON, SPEAKING OF MUSIC...
GREAT IDEA, JOEL! I CAN TAKE HER TO THE ROCK-AND-ROLL CAFÉ!
OUCH!
!
COOL PEOPLE, LIVE BANDS, GOOD MUSIC... SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD COMPROMISE, BRO!
DONE! I HOPE SHE'S FREE TONIGHT! AH, BUT ONE LAST PROBLEM...
HOW DO I ASK HER?
YOU COULD TRY USING YOUR MOUTH?
DRIIING
OH NO, RECESS IS OVER. IF I CAN'T FIND HER WHEN WE GET OUT...
DUDE LOOKS SO LOST...COULD HE REALLY BE IN LOVE?
DON'T PANIC, MAN. IF YOU WANNA TALK TO YOUR LADY WITHOUT BEING INTRUSIVE...

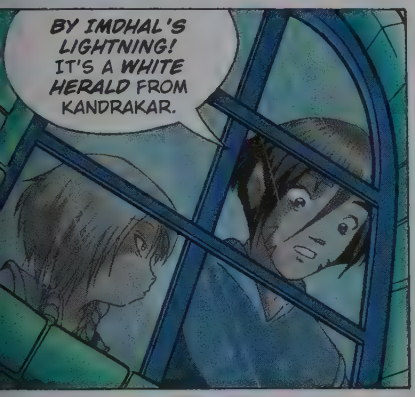

"...SEND HER A MESSAGE!"
TODAY, METAMOOR IS BURSTING WITH FLOWERS AND COLORS!

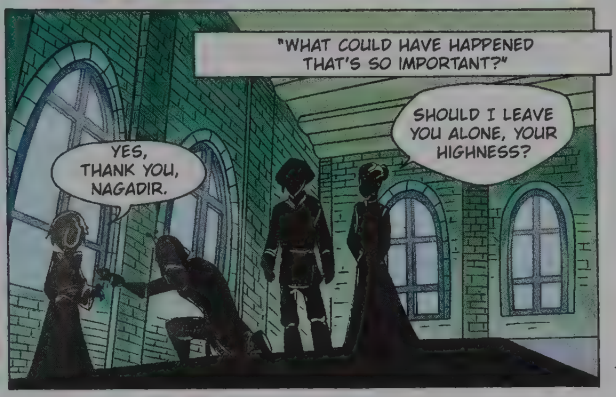
IT'S THE DAY OF THE HARVEST FESTIVAL. SOON, CARTS FROM ALL OVER THE PLANET WILL REACH THE CASTLE OF MERIDIAN...

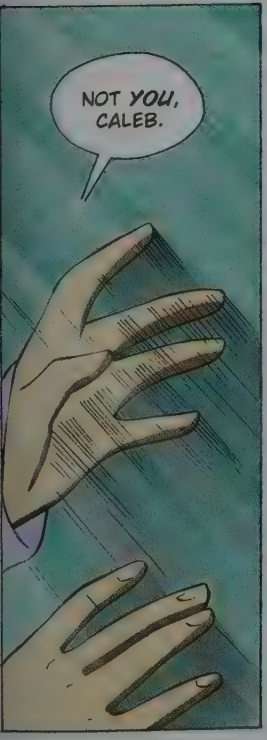
...LOADED WITH PRODUCTS OF THE EARTH TO SHARE AND TRADE WITH FARMERS FROM FARAWAY VILLAGES.


IN THE PALACE HALL, HER MAJESTY THE LIGHT OF MERIDIAN IS PREPARING FOR THE CEREMONY.
SHE'S EXCITED. SHE KNOWS TODAY WILL BE A SPECIAL DAY...


BUT SHE CAN'T POSSIBLY IMAGINE WHAT IT WILL BRING.
HEY...A MESSENGER!

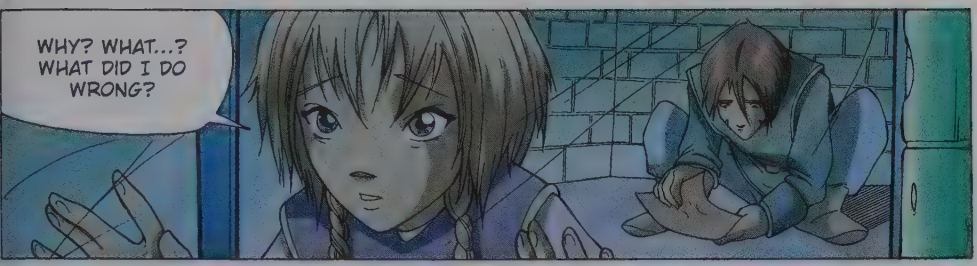

BY IMDHAL'S LIGHTNING! IT'S A WHITE HERALD FROM KANDRAKAR.

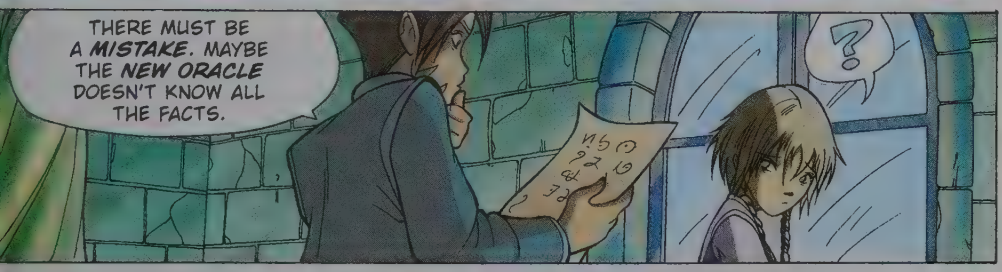

"WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED THAT'S SO IMPORTANT?"
SHOULD I LEAVE YOU ALONE, YOUR HIGHNESS?
YES, THANK YOU, NAGADIR.

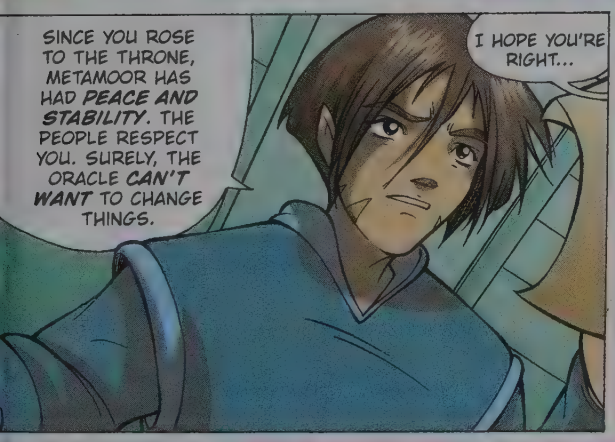

NOT YOU, CALEB.

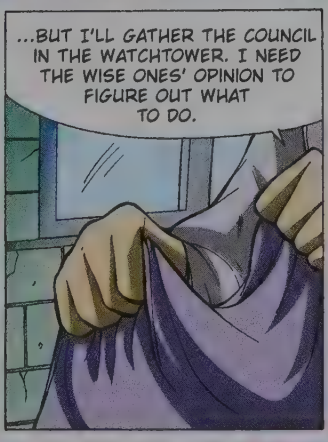
PLEASE STAY.

IF IT'S TRUE THAT WORDS CAN WOUND LIKE WEAPONS...
...THE BLOW ELYON RECEIVES IS LIKE THAT OF A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD.
202
FINDING OUT IN THE SAME INSTANT THAT KANDRAKAR HAS A NEW LORD SHE DOESN'T KNOW...
N-NO WAY!
...AND THAT HE QUESTIONS HER ACTIONS TO THE POINT OF ASKING HER TO RENOUNCE HER CROWN...
...IS MORE THAN ANYONE COULD BEAR...EVEN A QUEEN.


WHY? WHAT...? WHAT DID I DO WRONG?


THERE MUST BE A MISTAKE. MAYBE THE NEW ORACLE DOESN'T KNOW ALL THE FACTS.
?


SINCE YOU ROSE TO THE THRONE, METAMOOR HAS HAD PEACE AND STABILITY. THE PEOPLE RESPECT YOU. SURELY, THE ORACLE CAN'T WANT TO CHANGE THINGS.
I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT...


...BUT I'LL GATHER THE COUNCIL IN THE WATCHTOWER. I NEED THE WISE ONES' OPINION TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO.

ELYON...

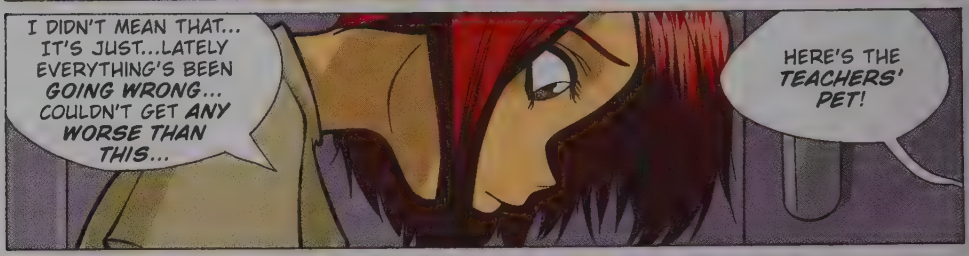
UM...MY QUEEN...

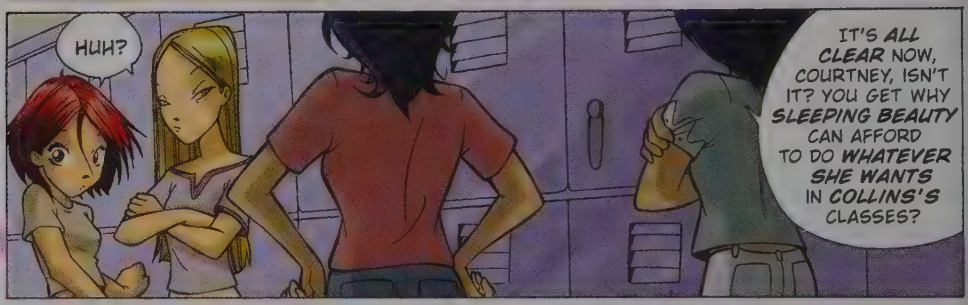
IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT. YOU'LL SEE.

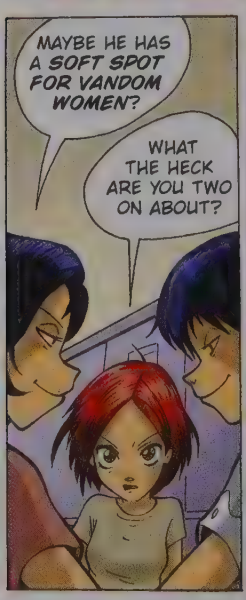
SHEFFIELD INSTITUTE. THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SOUND OF ALL.
DRIIIIN NN
THE BELL AT THE END OF CLASSES!
THAT'S ALL, GUYS. HAVE A NICE DAY!
NICE? NOT FOR ME...
DRIIIN NN
!
HEY, WILL!
WILL... WAIT!
IF I CAN GIVE MY UNASKED-FOR OPINION, I DON'T THINK SEEING EVERYTHING IN BLACK WILL MAKE THINGS BETTER.
HUH?

I MEAN ABOUT YOU AND MATT. SOMETIMES WHEN THINGS GET MESSY, YOU HAVE TO FIND THE COURAGE TO LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND AND START FRESH.
WHAT'S THIS? PEARLS OF WISDOM DAY? FIRST IRMA AND NOW YOU!
SO YOU KNOW, I'M NOT IN THE MOOD FOR YOUR PREACHING...
!
...AND ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE THE BEST PERSON TO GIVE THIS KIND OF ADVICE?
IT'S NOT LIKE YOU MANAGED TO SAVE YOUR RELATIONSHIP, RIGHT?
STUNK
.....
205

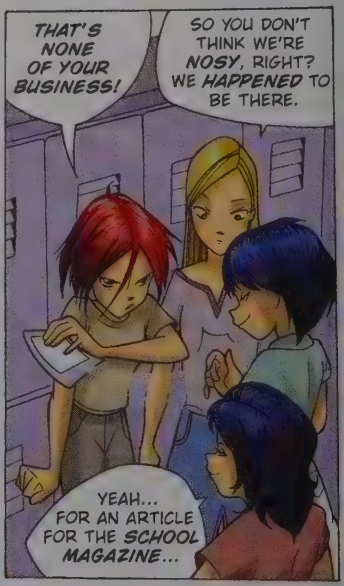
OH...SORRY, CORNELIA. I DUNNO WHAT GOT INTO ME, REALLY.
PONK

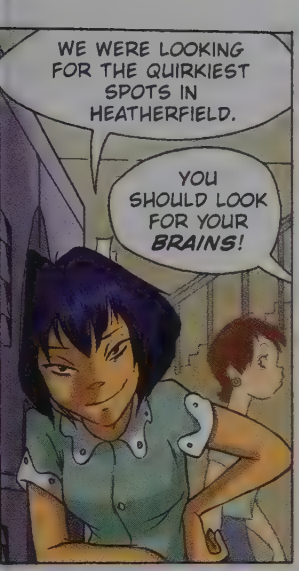

I DIDN'T MEAN THAT... IT'S JUST...LATELY EVERYTHING'S BEEN GOING WRONG... COULDN'T GET ANY WORSE THAN THIS...
HERE'S THE TEACHERS' PET!


HUH?
IT'S ALL CLEAR NOW, COURTNEY, ISN'T IT? YOU GET WHY SLEEPING BEAUTY CAN AFFORD TO DO WHATEVER SHE WANTS IN COLLINS'S CLASSES?


MAYBE HE HAS A SOFT SPOT FOR VANDOM WOMEN?
WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU TWO ON ABOUT?

YOU TELL US, WILL. HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THESE... OUT-OF-SCHOOL MEETINGS?
MOM, COLLINS, AND ME AFTER THE TRIP LAST SUNDAY!


THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!
SO YOU DON'T THINK WE'RE NOSY, RIGHT? WE HAPPENED TO BE THERE.
YEAH... FOR AN ARTICLE FOR THE SCHOOL MAGAZINE...

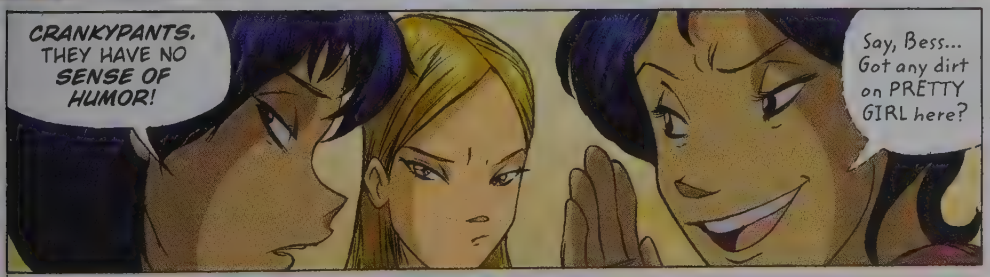

WE WERE LOOKING FOR THE QUIRKIEST SPOTS IN HEATHERFIELD.
YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR YOUR BRAINS!

I DOUBT THERE'S ANY IN THOSE HEADS OF YOURS!

HEAR THAT, BESS? RUDE!
YEAH. I'M NOT SURPRISED HER DATES ALWAYS END IN DISASTER.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW POOR HUGH JONES SURVIVED A WHOLE AFTERNOON WITH YOU?*
YOU SNAKE! SHUT YOUR MOUTH!
THAT'S ENOUGH...
*THE DATE HAPPENED IN W.I.T.C.H. CHAPTER 38

I'M LEAVING.
WAIT, WILL. I'M COMING WITH YOU.


CRANKYPANTS. THEY HAVE NO SENSE OF HUMOR!
Say, Bess... Got any dirt on PRETTY GIRL here?

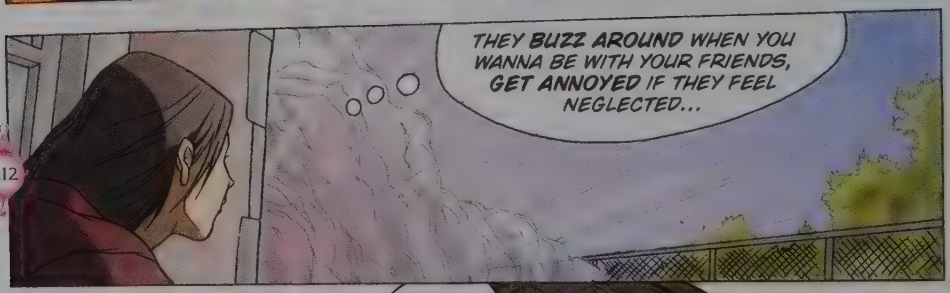
THAT FUSSPOT? FORGET IT! SOMEONE WILL HAVE TO CUSTOM BUILD HER A BOYFRIEND! I DOUBT ANYONE ON EARTH IS GOOD ENOUGH.
THEN MAYBE SHE'LL GO OUT WITH AN ALIEN! HA-HA-HA!
A GREEN GUY WITH ANTENNAE... CALLED XY OR ALPHA-GAMMA OR...
CALEB...
A FLEETING MEMORY WAS ENOUGH TO BRING YOU BACK TO MY MIND...
"HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE I LAST SAW YOU? SO MUCH ANGER AND REGRET, SO MANY TEARS!
"AND NOW...IT'S HARD TO SEE THE DETAILS OF YOUR FACE, TO HEAR THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICE...
"HOW ODD... THINKING ABOUT YOU DOESN'T HURT ANYMORE... WHEREVER YOU ARE, I SENSE YOU, WITHOUT FEELING BITTER OR SAD..."

"...WITHOUT RESENTMENT."
AS I THOUGHT!
PLUFF
THE COUNCIL OF METAMOOR AGREES WITH THEIR QUEEN.
STONK
AS I IMAGINED, THE LIGHT OF MERIDIAN HAS REFUSED TO HAND OVER THE CROWN OF LIGHT.
I'M FORCED TO TAKE ACTION I NEVER WANTED TO TAKE.
209
SIR?
GATHER THE CONGREGATION IMMEDIATELY. AS MUCH AS IT PAINS ME, IT'S TIME TO REESTABLISH ORDER.
THIS ACT OF INSUBORDINATION HAS BROKEN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KANDRAKAR AND METAMOOR...

...AND MARKED YOU, ELYON, AS AN ENEMY OF THE FORTRESS...JUST AS I'D HOPED.
YOU FELL INTO MY TRAP ALL TOO EASILY, LITTLE SISTER...
I BET YOU HAVEN'T CONSIDERED THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR REFUSAL.
CRCCK
...WHICH WILL JUSTIFY ANY ACTION TAKEN BY THE ORACLE AGAINST METAMOOR.
NOW I JUST HAVE TO SET MY REVENGE IN MOTION AND ENJOY THE SHOW!
I SAVED YOU THE ROLE OF THE PROTAGONIST, BUT YOU'LL BE FLANKED BY FIVE SPECIAL GUESTS— YOUNG, ARROGANT, AND ANNOYING!
IT'S SHOWTIME FOR CORNELIA, IRMA, HAY LIN, TARANEE, AND...

WILL...
"ARE YOU FREE TONIGHT?"
UM... TOO DIRECT.
"WANNA COME OUT?"
WHAT IF SHE SAYS NO?
AAARGH. I'M AN IDIOT. I'M HERE THINKING ABOUT HOW TO SAY IT...BUT FIRST I SHOULD FIND HER AND HOPE SHE'S NOT...
HEY, GUYS. DO YOU FEEL A BIT DIZZY?
211
THAT'S NORMAL FOR YOU, IRMA.
BUT IT'S TRUE. THE LAST CALL WAS ALMOST PAINFUL.
...WITH HER FRIENDS, FOR A CHANGE.
YEAH... AS IF THE ORACLE INVADED OUR HEADS.
THAT'S CALLED BREAKING AND ENTERING.
WHY? DOES ANYONE LIVE IN THERE?
WILL! HEY, WILL!
WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT THAT'S SO IMPORTANT?

WHADDAYA THINK ENDARNO HAS TO TELL US THAT'S SO IMPORTANT?
I HOPE IT'S URGENT ENOUGH TO JUSTIFY YET ANOTHER ESCAPADE TO KANDRAKAR.
WE HAD LUNCH AT THE GOLDEN TO TALK ABOUT SCIENCE HOME-WORK, OKAY?
OKAY, BUT NOW LET'S GO. I DON'T WANT ANYONE TO GET SUSPICIOUS.
C'MON, TARA. THE SCHOOL EXIT IS ON THE OTHER SIDE. WHO'S GONNA SEE US?
GIRLS. THEY'RE SO RANDOM!


THEY BUZZ AROUND WHEN YOU WANNA BE WITH YOUR FRIENDS, GET ANNOYED IF THEY FEEL NEGLECTED...

...AND YOU GOTTA CHASE THEM TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD IF YOU DON'T WANT THEM TO...
... DISAPPEAR!
SHA WHAM

"THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. WHERE'D THEY GO?
"I SAW THEM COME THIS WAY AND TURN THE CORNER... I SAW THEM...
"...DIDN'T I?
"THEY SAY BEING TIRED MESSES WITH YOU, BUT YOU NEVER BELIEVE IT TILL IT HAPPENS TO YOU...
213
"YESTERDAY, WE PLAYED LATE...THEN CHATTED, HAD A LAST SODA...WHAT TIME DID I GET TO BED?
"WELL, IF I HALLUCINATED, BETTER NOT TALK ABOUT IT. JOEL TEASES ME ENOUGH ALREADY ABOUT WILL...
"UGH...SPEAKING OF...MAYBE THE ROCK-AND-ROLL CAFÉ ISN'T THE BEST IDEA FOR TONIGHT. I MEAN... LOUD MUSIC, TOO MANY OF MY BUDDIES..."
ZIIP

BETTER SOMEWHERE QUIET. MAYBE IN THE OPEN— WITH A CHEERFUL ATMOSPHERE!
WELL DONE, MATT. TOO BAD A PLACE LIKE THAT ONLY EXISTS IN YOUR HEAD...
...OR DOES IT?
Grande riapertura del LUNA PARK di HEATHERFIELD
SOLO PER OGGI: INGRESSO OMAGGIO X 2!
JUST WHAT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR, HUH?
A STROKE OF GENIUS THAT WILL EARN ME A DEBT OF GRATITUDE FROM THE MASTER...

...A DEBT OF GRATITUDE, GUARDIANS...
...IT'S WHAT KANDRAKAR WILL OWE YOU IF YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS DIFFICULT MISSION.
YOU CAN COUNT ON US, ORACLE.
WHATEVER OUR TASK, WE'LL DO ANYTHING TO BE WORTHY OF THE SITUATION.
Wow, Will. Whatcha eat for breakfast, BREAD AND BRAVERY?
If Endarno still doubts our capabilities, I think we should SHOW HIM what we can do, right?
YOU SPEAK FIGHTING WORDS, GIRL.
I'M GLAD, BUT AGAINST THIS ENEMY, YOU'LL NEED COURAGE, RESOLVE, EFFORT!
LET US PROVE WE'RE WORTHY OF YOUR TRUST, SIR.
YOU CAN DECIDE IF IT'S WELL-PLACED.
SO BE IT. I WON'T DETAIN YOU ANY LONGER. I HOPE YOU'LL BE THIS CONFIDENT DURING YOUR MISSION.
YOU ROCK, WILL!
GO, BOSS!
AWESOME!

YOU KNOW METAMOOR, ONE OF THE UNIVERSES UNDER KANDRAKAR'S WATCHFUL EYE.
SHATZZZ
RECENTLY, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN METAMOOR AND THE FORTRESS HAS BECOME ROCKY.
THE QUEEN, SISTER OF THE TYRANT PHOBOS, HAS REFUSED TO OBEY THE ORACLE'S REQUEST...
...TO HAND OVER THE CROWN TO ALLOW FREE ELECTIONS TO BE HELD IN HER KINGDOM.
!
I ASK YOU TO RESTORE ORDER IN METAMOOR...
...BY DEPOSING THE LIGHT OF MERIDIAN, BEGINNING WITH HER ARREST...
...AND SEVERING FOREVER ANY TIE BETWEEN THE ESCANOR DYNASTY AND THE CROWN.
SHATZZZ

ANY QUESTIONS?
GOOD. IF EVERYTHING'S CLEAR...
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, SIR...
...I THINK YOU'RE MAKING A HUGE MISTAKE.
MAYBE YOU DON'T KNOW ELYON WELL. TO RESTORE PEACE, SHE DIDN'T HESITATE TO STAND AGAINST HER BROTHER. IT'S THANKS TO HER PHOBOS FELL.
SHE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THAT TYRANT. I'M SURE THE PEOPLE WOULD REELECT HER ANYWAY. IF ELYON SITS ON MERIDIAN'S THRONE, IT'S NOT BECAUSE OF HER NOBLE BLOOD BUT HER NOBLE SPIRIT. I KNOW THAT BECAUSE BEFORE BECOMING QUEEN...
...SHE WAS MY BEST FRIEND.

THE PASSION WITH WHICH YOU DEFEND THE LIGHT OF MERIDIAN IS TOUCHING, GUARDIAN...
...BUT I DIDN'T ASK FOR YOUR ADVICE ON HOW TO PROCEED. WE'RE NOT HERE TO DISCUSS KANDRAKAR'S DECISION, MERELY YOUR COOPERATION.
OR SHOULD I INFER FROM YOUR WORDS THAT YOU ARE UNREADY TO FACE YOUR MISSION?
YOUR REQUEST IS...
...QUITE VALID, SIR.
WILL! WHAT THE HECK...?!
You're not agreeing with this scruffy bag?
He's asking us to ARREST ELYON...DRAG HER from her world...
...to GO AGAINST our friend!
FOLLOW MY LEAD, GUYS. HE'S TESTING US.
ACCORDING TO KANDRAKAR'S LAWS, HIS REQUEST IS LEGIT. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ELYON AND PHOBOS COULD BE DANGEROUS. THE CROWN OF LIGHT GRANTS ABSOLUTE POWER, AND HE THINKS THIS MIGHT BE A PROBLEM IN THE FUTURE.
REFUSING TO FOLLOW ENDARNO'S ORDERS WILL JUST GIVE HIM...

...ONE MORE REASON TO DISCREDIT THEM. THAT'S ALL I NEED TO DO AWAY WITH THESE GUARDIANS...
"...AND WITH YOU, ELYON. SOWING DISCORD BETWEEN YOU IS JUST THE FIRST STEP ON THE PATH THAT WILL LEAD ME TO RECONQUERING METAMOOR.
"I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE GRAND FINALE. AN ARMY OF FEROCIOUS SARVAK, TRAINED WHEN I WAS STILL MERIDIAN'S PRINCE, IS READY TO SPRING INTO ACTION AFTER YOUR ARREST.
219
"I'LL UNLEASH THEM AGAINST THE GUARDIANS. EVERYONE WILL THINK YOU GAVE THE ORDER TO ATTACK THE FORTRESS'S EMISSARIES, COME TO RECLAIM THE CROWN OF LIGHT..."
...AND THE RIFT BETWEEN METAMOOR AND KANDRAKAR WILL BE COMPLETE. JUST LIKE MY REVENGE.

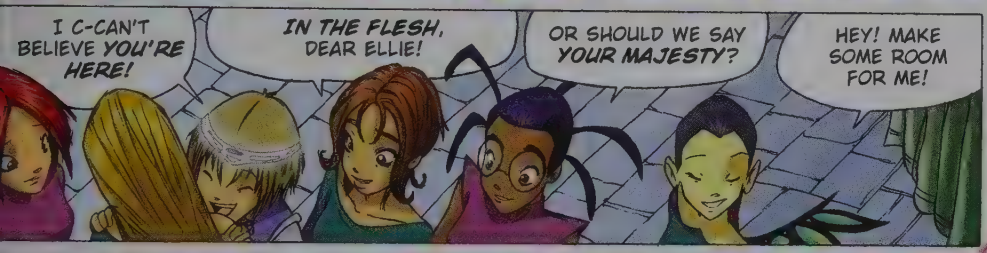
IT'S TIME TO GIVE ME AN ANSWER, GUARDIANS...
...TIME TO MAKE YOUR CHOICE.
MAKING A CHOICE, PICKING ONE THING OVER ANOTHER...
IT HAPPENS ALL THE TIME. EVERY DAY IS FULL OF DECISIONS.
AS SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT AS THEY MAY SEEM AT TIMES...
EDITORIAL MEETING— KEEP OUT!
...THEIR CONSEQUENCES CAN REVERSE LIVES.

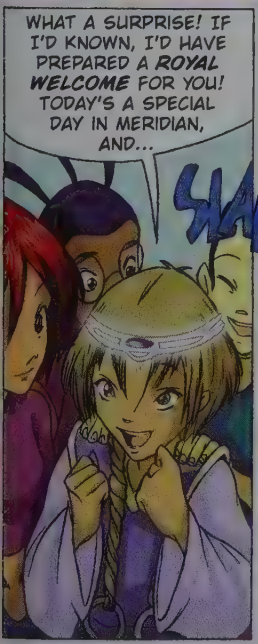
But surely the hardest part of any decision is that...
...each choice means giving up something else.
221
What to sacrifice, then, when the choice is between saving your own future...
...or saving a friend's?
Decisions are seldom easy...

THIS IS MERIDIAN, THE CAPITAL OF METAMOOR, A WORLD THAT TODAY CELEBRATES THE HARVEST FESTIVAL.
CARTS OF PRODUCE TRAVEL TOWARD THE CASTLE, TO BE SHARED IN A GREAT BANQUET TO WHICH EVERYONE IS INVITED.
THE MUSICIANS ARE READY. THE DANCERS HAVE BEEN REHEARSING FOR THE BIG DAY..
222
AFTER THE CELEBRATION, LEFTOVERS WILL BE DIVIDED SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY THE HARVESTED FOODS— EVEN THOSE WHO DIDN'T DO THE HARVESTING.
SO HAS DECREED THE QUEEN, THE LIGHT OF MERIDIAN. THIS IS A DAY OF IMPORTANT DECISIONS FOR HER...
...AND OF UNEXPECTED VISITS!
I'D PICK THE LIGHTER ONE.

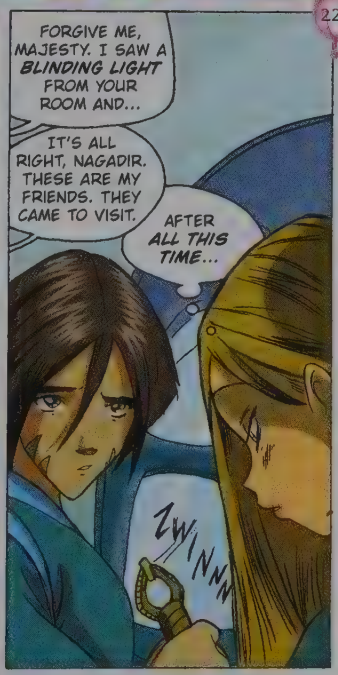
...GREEN IS STILL YOUR FAVORITE COLOR, RIGHT?

GUYS!


I C-CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE HERE!
IN THE FLESH, DEAR ELLIE!
OR SHOULD WE SAY YOUR MAJESTY?
HEY! MAKE SOME ROOM FOR ME!


WHAT A SURPRISE! IF I'D KNOWN, I'D HAVE PREPARED A ROYAL WELCOME FOR YOU! TODAY'S A SPECIAL DAY IN MERIDIAN, AND...
SLAM

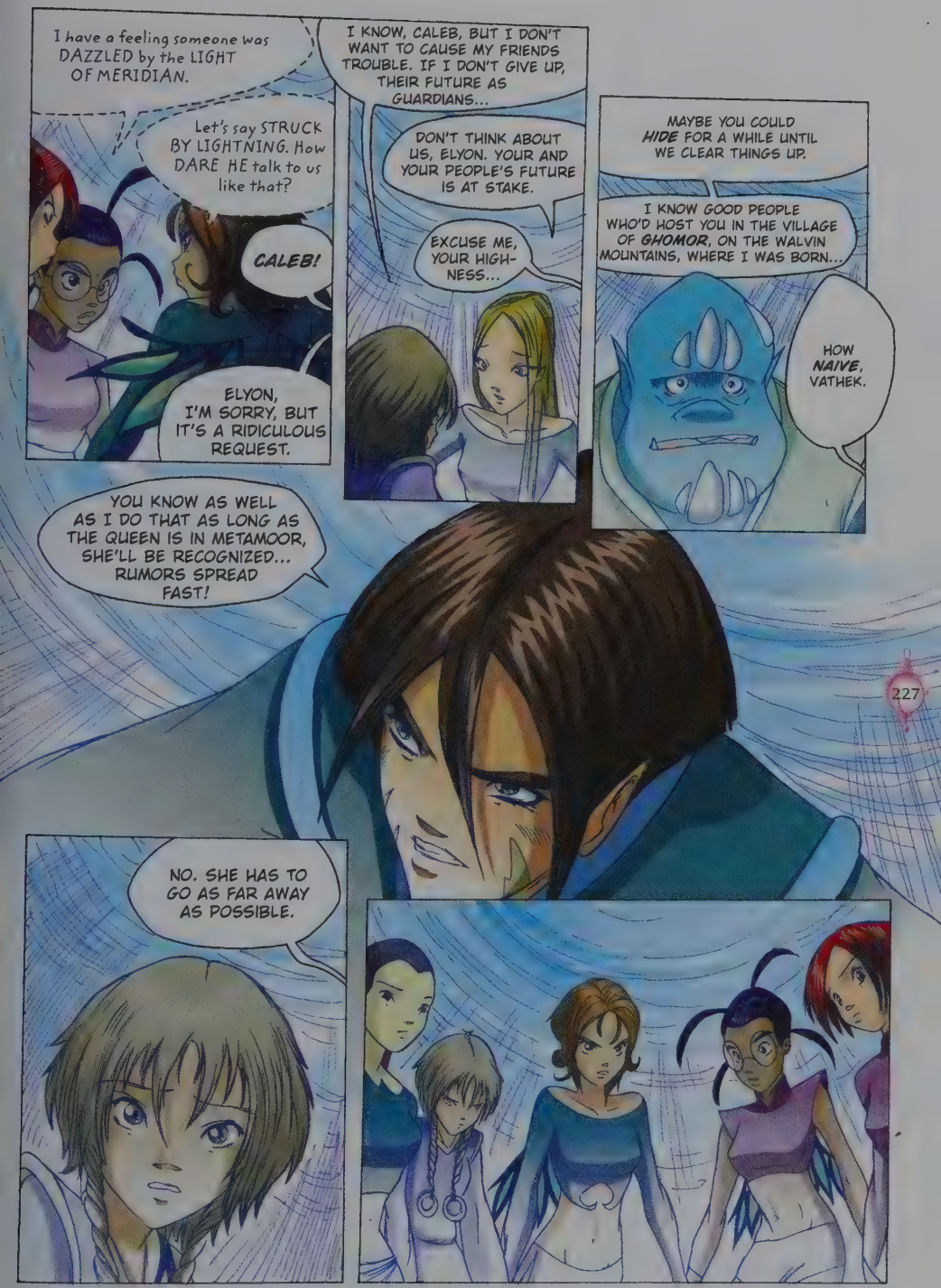
WHAT'S GOING ON? EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT, ELYON?
CALEB!


FORGIVE ME, MAJESTY. I SAW A BLINDING LIGHT FROM YOUR ROOM AND...
IT'S ALL RIGHT, NAGADIR. THESE ARE MY FRIENDS. THEY CAME TO VISIT.
AFTER ALL THIS TIME...
ZWINNN

HEY, VATHEK! HOW YOU DOING, BIG GUY?
PAT
GOOD TO SEE YOU, GIRLS. WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?
OOOF!
PACK
YEAH, I HAVEN'T ASKED YOU YET!
I GUESS YOU'RE NOT HERE FOR THE HARVEST FESTIVAL, HUH?
NO, ELYON. WE WERE SENT BY THE ORACLE...
224
IT'S ABOUT THE CROWN OF LIGHT, ISN'T IT?
THAT'S RIGHT, AND I SWEAR, WE'D RATHER NOT COME AT ALL...
"...THAN COMPLETE THE MISSION ENDARNO SET FOR US."
A-ARREST ME?

I DON'T KNOW WHO THIS ENDARNO IS, BUT HE'LL HAVE TO DEAL WITH ME BEFORE HE CAN DO THAT.
AAAAH!
ELYON! WHAT'S GOING ON? ARE YOU OKAY?
MY HEAD HURTS...AS IF SOMEONE WAS TRYING TO GET INSIDE IT. I KNOW IT SOUNDS ABSURD...
NOT IN THE SLIGHTEST, BELIEVE ME!
WE HAD THE SAME FEELING WHEN WE WERE LAST CALLED TO KANDRAKAR.
YEAH... AND IT'S NOT HARD TO GUESS WHO THE INTRUDER IS!
HOLD HANDS.
?
I'LL CREATE A PROTECTION FIELD SO NOBODY CAN EAVESDROP.

THERE ARE MOMENTS THAT SEEM TO LAST FOREVER...
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, CORNELIA.
...AND INFINITE PAST MOMENTS READY TO VANISH IN AN INSTANT.
FZZZZZ
IT'S THE MAGIC OF TIME!
IF YOU LET IT, IT CAN MELT TENSIONS AND HEAL DISAGREEMENTS THAT ONCE SEEMED INSURMOUNTABLE...
...AND OPEN UP DEPTHS OF PURE SERENITY WHERE THERE USED TO BE REGRET AND DISCOMFORT.
TIME FLOWS AND TAKES AWAY THAT MOMENT OF NEW-FOUND JOY TOO, BRINGING CORNELIA AND CALEB BACK TO THE GRAVE PRESENT.
THERE... NOW WE CAN SPEAK FREELY.
GOOD, BECAUSE I WANT TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WE'LL NEVER GIVE UP THE CROWN OF LIGHT.


I have a feeling someone was DAZZLED by the LIGHT OF MERIDIAN.
Let's say STRUCK BY LIGHTNING. How DARE HE talk to us like that?
CALEB!
ELYON, I'M SORRY, BUT IT'S A RIDICULOUS REQUEST.
I KNOW, CALEB, BUT I DON'T WANT TO CAUSE MY FRIENDS TROUBLE. IF I DON'T GIVE UP, THEIR FUTURE AS GUARDIANS...
DON'T THINK ABOUT US, ELYON. YOUR AND YOUR PEOPLE'S FUTURE IS AT STAKE.
EXCUSE ME, YOUR HIGH-NESS...
MAYBE YOU COULD HIDE FOR A WHILE UNTIL WE CLEAR THINGS UP.
I KNOW GOOD PEOPLE WHO'D HOST YOU IN THE VILLAGE OF GHOMOR, ON THE WALVIN MOUNTAINS, WHERE I WAS BORN...
HOW NAIVE, VATHEK.
YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT AS LONG AS THE QUEEN IS IN METAMOOR, SHE'LL BE RECOGNIZED... RUMORS SPREAD FAST!
NO. SHE HAS TO GO AS FAR AWAY AS POSSIBLE.

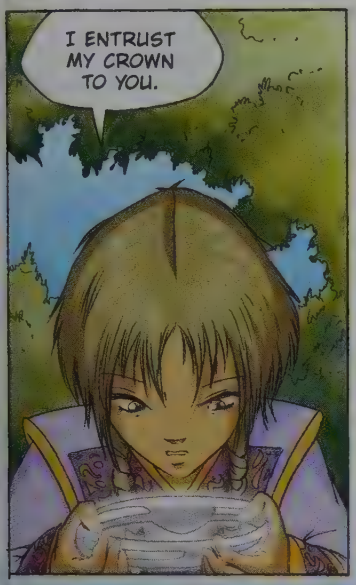
WELL, ELLIE... TOO BAD YOU ALREADY KNOW HEATHERFIELD. WE COULD'VE GIVEN YOU A TOUR OF THE CITY.
THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR JOKES, IRMA.
IT COULD BE THE PERFECT SOLUTION ...
WOW! I MIGHT JUST START LIKING THIS GUY.
ENDARNO WOULD NEVER LOOK FOR ELYON ON EARTH. SHE COULD STAY AS LONG AS SHE NEEDS...ME AND VATHEK WILL TELL THE COUNCIL.
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I HAD IN MIND.
WHAT MIND?
THE ONE THAT JUST CAME UP WITH A FLAWLESS PLAN, IN CASE YOU DIDN'T NOTICE!
THEN LET'S HEAR IT, GENIUS. HOW ARE YOU GONNA HIDE ELYON AT YOUR HOUSE FROM YOUR DAD?
WHO SAID MY HOUSE? SHE CAN STAY WITH ORUBE! SHE LIVES ALONE, AND SHE'S A WARRIOR— THE PERFECT BODYGUARD.
EXCELLENT.
228

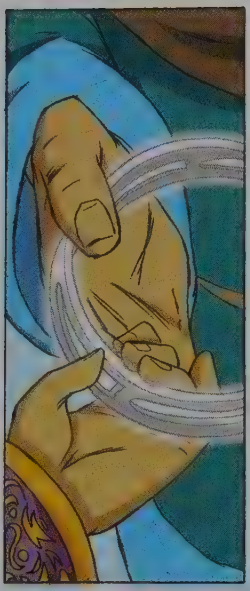
NOW WE JUST GOTTA FIND A WAY TO GET ELYON OUT OF THE CASTLE WITHOUT MAKING ANYONE SUSPICIOUS AND...
TOC TOC
SORRY FOR INTERRUPTING, YOUR HIGHNESS, BUT... THE CARTS ARE ABOUT TO REACH THE CASTLE.
FZZZZ
A CONNECTION BREAKS IN MERIDIAN...
...AND ANOTHER IS RESTORED IN KANDRAKAR WHERE, WITH ELYON'S PROTECTION FIELD GONE, ENDARNO RESUMES HIS FAVORITE PASTIME...
FINALLY! I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THE CONNECTION TO METAMOOR WAS INTERRUPTED...
FZZZ
...BUT IT LOOKS LIKE I DIDN'T MISS MUCH.
THE FESTIVAL IS ABOUT TO BEGIN.
WE'LL BE RIGHT THERE, NAGADIR.
YES, HAVE FUN WHILE YOU CAN... IT'LL BE YOUR LAST CHANCE.
I'LL WAIT UNTIL YOU AND THE GUARDIANS LEAVE BEFORE I ATTACK YOU, SISTER...THE FESTIVAL WILL SURELY BE OVER BY THEN...

"AS THEY SAY, REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED COLD!"
YUM! IT'S SUPER! =MUNCH= WHAT'S THIS BREAD CALLED AGAIN, ELLIE?
HUH?
SORRY, IRMA, I WAS DISTRACTED. DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?
I DUNNO HOW YOU CAN STUFF YOUR FACE AT A TIME LIKE THIS...
I'M HONORING THE CHEFS! WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
230
THE PROBLEM IS TIME IS TIGHT, AND WE STILL DON'T KNOW HOW TO GET ELYON OUTTA HERE.
RELAX, GUYS. WE FOUND A SOLUTION.
"WE"?
WELL, CALEB WAS TELLING ME ABOUT THE HARVEST FESTIVAL, AND SUDDENLY, WE BOTH THOUGHT...
UM...CORNELIA... SORRY TO INTERRUPT, BUT...
WELL...WE WOULDN'T WANT TO GET YOUR HOPES UP...

I mean, looks like STRIPY FACE is smitten with someone else now!
?
IT'S ALL RIGHT, IRMA. CALEB AND I JUST DISCOVERED SOMETHING WONDERFUL.
OOMPF! WHAT?
THAT DESPITE WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN US, WE CAN STILL BE GOOD FRIENDS!
THAT'S GREAT NEWS!
AWESOME!
AND WHAT ABOUT YOUR FANTASTIC IDEA TO HELP ELYON?
I THINK IT MIGHT WORK. HEAR ME OUT...

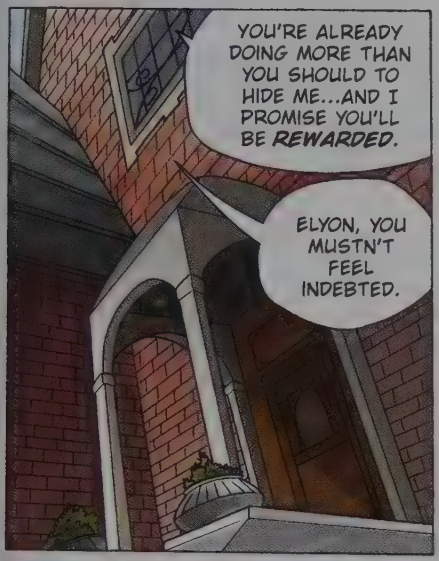
"WHEN THE FESTIVAL'S OVER, THE CARTS WILL HEAD BACK TO THEIR VILLAGES AFTER DIVIDING UP THE LEFTOVER PRODUCE.
"THEY'LL TAKE DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS, AND ONE WILL HEAD INTO A FOREST...
"...AND STOP IN A SMALL CLEARING!"
PERFECT, NOBODY FOLLOWED US!
CAN YOU GET OFF, GUYS?
232
CRIPES! I'VE NEVER BOUNCED SO MUCH WHILE SITTING STILL!
I SWEAR I'LL NEVER COMPLAIN ABOUT PETER'S DRIVING AGAIN!
IT WAS WORTH IT. ENDARNO'LL THINK WE'RE STILL AT THE CASTLE. WHEN HE LOOKS FOR ELYON...
IT'LL BE LIKE FINDING A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK, HEE-HEE!
THANK YOU SO MUCH, GUYS.
OUR PLEASURE, WILL. I HAVEN'T WORN A HAT LIKE THIS SINCE THAT TIME IN HEATHERFIELD, REMEMBER?*
QUIT REMINISCING, VATHEK. ELYON MUST BE TAKEN TO SAFETY QUICKLY.
CALEB ...
*REMEMBER W.I.T.C.H. CHAPTER 10?

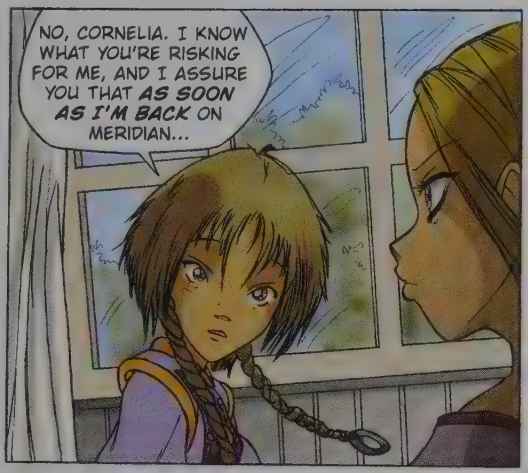




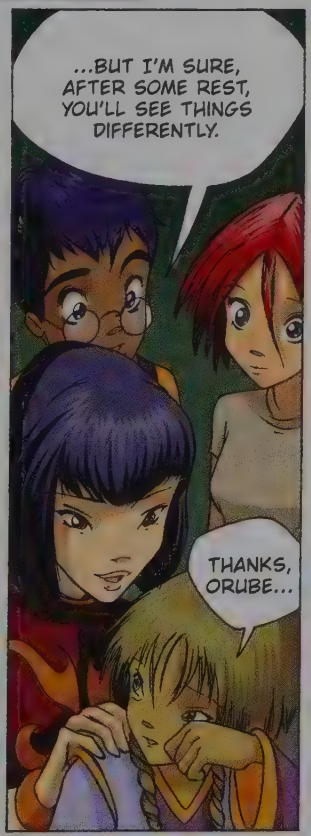
"IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO YOU..."

"I COULD NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF...
"...NEVER!"
NEVER SAY NEVER!
WHO'DA THOUGHT ONE DAY YOU'D COME BACK TO HEATHERFIELD, HUH?
WHAT'S IT LIKE?
HOW ARE YOU FEELING, ELYON?
MAYBE YOU SHOULD LET HER BREATHE. SHE SEEMS A BIT FRAZZLED.
234
HI, ELYON. WELCOME. I'M ORUBE.
FOR A WARRIOR, YOU DON'T LOOK TOO TOUGH!
I suggest you don't rub her the wrong way. She could make your HOUSE ARREST a real pain!
IRMA!
OOPS... I...I DIDN'T MEAN...
DON'T WORRY. I KNOW WHAT'S WHAT...
ELYON BROWN DISAPPEARED WITH HER PARENTS LONG AGO. I'LL HAVE TO SPEND MY DAYS IN HEATHERFIELD LOCKED UP...


YOU'RE ALREADY DOING MORE THAN YOU SHOULD TO HIDE ME...AND I PROMISE YOU'LL BE *REWARDED*.
ELYON, YOU MUSTN'T FEEL INDEBTED.


NO, CORNELIA. I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE RISKING FOR ME, AND I ASSURE YOU THAT *AS SOON AS I'M BACK* ON MERIDIAN...

...IF AND WHEN I'M BACK ON MERIDIAN...
YOU'RE TIRED AND UPSET. OF COURSE IT'S OVER-WHELMING...


...BUT I'M SURE, AFTER SOME REST, YOU'LL SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY.
THANKS, ORUBE...

AND THANK YOU, GIRLS. REALLY.
COME. I'LL SHOW YOU YOUR ROOM.

CALL ME IF YOU NEED ANYTHING. I'M RIGHT NEXT DOOR.

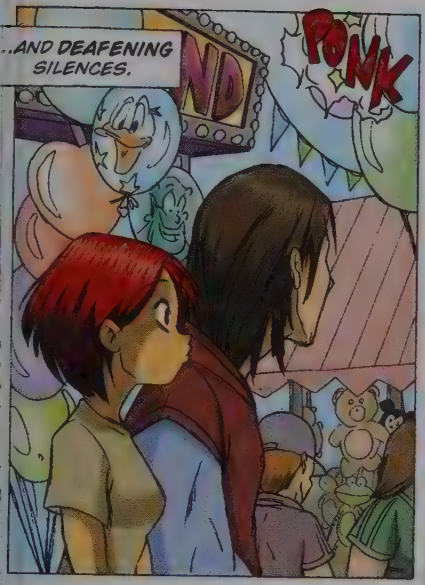
HERE. COME ON IN, ELYON.
"MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME!"
YEAH... HOME...
"MERIDIAN..."
236
DARN IT! WHERE ARE THE GUARDIANS?
BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY... WHERE'S ELYON?
IT'S PERFECTLY USELESS TO SEND THE SARVAK IN!
STONK

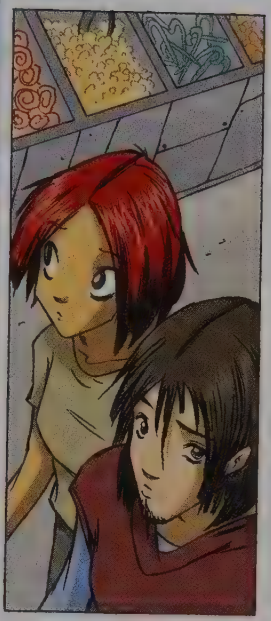
"I JUST HOPE CEDRIC'S PLAN IS GOING BETTER..."
TOTAL BAD LUCK! SHE NEVER PICKED UP?
No! She didn't even text back. Nothing—like she didn't have her phone.
SO FINALLY, I CALLED HER HOUSE, AND HER MOTHER PICKED UP!
Uh-oh!
No, she was nice! She said Will was out for lunch and she'd tell her I called when she got back.
GOOD. THEN YOU COULD MEET UP AFTER ALL...IF MR. UNDECIDED DECIDED WHERE TO TAKE HER.
CARDIO'S
I THINK I'LL GO TO THAT PLACE ON THE FLYERS THEY WERE HANDING OUT AT SCHOOL, Y'KNOW?
Um, I think I took one too, but I didn't pay attention...
PETE'S HERE. I GOTTA GO. GOOD LUCK, BRO...
...REMEMBER, I WANT DETAILS TOMORROW!
Will do. See ya!
HEY, THIS MUST BE THE FLYER OLSEN WAS TALKING ABOUT...
A NEW CHEAP MENU AT THE GOLDEN? NO WAY, MY MAN!
GOLDEN
NEW CHEAP MENU

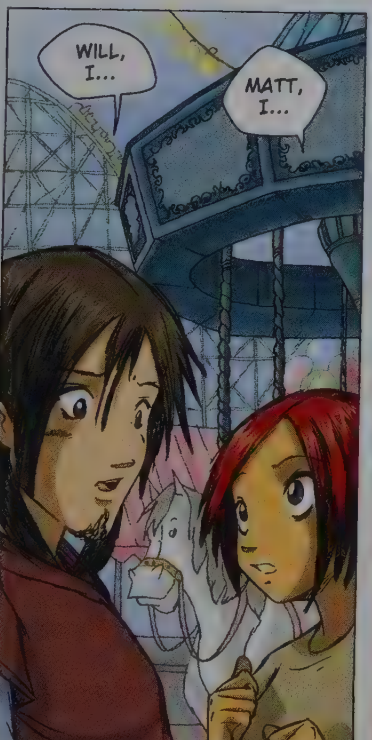
"I EXPECTED BETTER FROM YOU FOR SUCH AN *IMPORTANT DATE!*"
AT FIVE? BUT THAT'S IN TEN MINUTES!
LOOKS LIKE IT WAS A *LONG LUNCH...*
IF I'D KNOWN YOU'D BE OUT SO LONG, I WOULDN'T HAVE TOLD HIM YOU'D BE HERE NOW.
I TOLD YOU... WE HAD TO DO OUR *SCIENCE HOMEWORK.*
COME ON, SUSAN. YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT WORK LUNCHES CAN RUN ON!
THAT'S WHAT *CELL PHONES* ARE FOR! I DIDN'T GET YOU ONE TO LEAVE IT RINGING IN YOUR BACKPACK WHILE YOU *HAVE FUN ELSEWHERE*, MISSY!
ELSEWHERE? MOM, I WAS LITERALLY ON ANOTHER WORLD. BUT HOW CAN I TELL YOU?
UM...I HATE TO INTERRUPT THIS LOVELY *FAMILY SCENE, BUT...*
...IF TIME WAS TIGHT BEFORE, NOW IT'S REALLY RUNNING OUT! IF I WERE YOU, I'D HURRY UP...
I THINK OUR *WHITE KNIGHT* WILL SHOW UP FOR YOUR DATE...
...RIGHT ON TIME!
ARGH! WHAT'S GOING ON?
BREEEEP

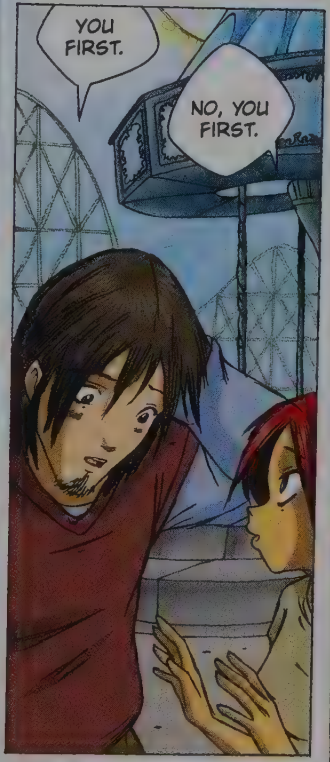
"I HAVE THE FEELING I'M TOTALLY UNPREPARED FOR WHATEVER IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN.
SHE'S COMING, MATT.
"CRIPES! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS CHANCE FOREVER, AND NOW IT SEEMS LIKE THE WORST POSSIBLE MOMENT!
"MAYBE I'M JUST LETTING MOM'S DARK MOOD GET TO ME.
OH, DEAN, I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH HER. SHE'S GROWING SO DISTANT...
YOUR BABY IS GROWING UP! IT'S NORMAL!
"OR MAYBE I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. I FEEL SO CLUMSY...A TOTAL KLUTZ!
HI, WILL.
HI, MATT...
"AND MATT? WHAT'S HE HIDING BEHIND THAT SMILE? DOES HE KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING?
HOP ON— AND NO QUESTIONS.
"NO QUESTIONS, HUH? GOOD. SO I WON'T HAVE TO FIND ANY WORDS FOR A WHILE. AT LEAST UNTIL..."

"...WE REACH OUR DESTINATION."
WILL!
WILL, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? C'MON!
MIRROR HOUSE
240
SOMETHING WRONG?
I TH-THOUGHT THIS PLACE HAD BEEN ABANDONED FOR YEARS!
SALOON
CROSSING THAT THRESHOLD IS A B
LIKE CHOOSING TO JUMP, TO LEAV
BEHIND FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY
AND DIVE INTO THE UNKNOWN...
AN UNKNOWN FULL OF AWKWARDNESS...
YEAH, THEY JUST RESTORED IT. DIDN'T YOU SEE THE FLYERS WHEN WE GOT OUT OF SCHOOL?
I DIDN'T EVEN GET OUT OF SCHOOL TODAY... WE HOPPED STRAIGHT TO KANDRAKAR!
N-NO... I...
...SHYNESS...
EVEN BETTER! OR IT WOULDN'T BE A SURPRISE!









*MATT AND WILL'S DISCUSSION HAPPENED IN CHAPTER 38

I DUNNO WHAT GOT INTO ME...I GOT CARRIED AWAY AND ENDED UP SAYING THINGS I DIDN'T MEAN.
MAYBE...I HOPED YOU'D APOLOGIZE FOR BAD-MOUTHING REBECCA. I MEAN, I WANTED TO GET A REACTION OUT OF YOU...
...BUT I NEVER THOUGHT YOU WERE SOMEONE WHO CAN'T BE TRUSTED. I...
MATT, PLEASE. THAT'S ENOUGH...
0,50
CANDIES
I...I SHOULD BE APOLOGIZING FOR TREATING YOU SO BAD. I'D REALLY LOVE TO TELL YOU EVERYTHING, BUT...
...SOMETIMES THINGS ARE HARD TO EXPLAIN...LIKE THERE ARE DIFFERENT WILLS INSIDE ME WHO DON'T GET ALONG.
HEY...DON'T WORRY. IT'S THE SAME FOR ME, Y'KNOW.
242
IT'S SO DARN COMPLICATED TO ADMIT HOW YOU FEEL, ISN'T IT?
!
C'MON, LET'S HAVE A RIDE ON THE FERRIS WHEEL!

"THE VIEW FROM UP THERE WILL MAKE YOUR HEAD SPIN!"
HNNN...
WILL, YOU OKAY?
I TH-THINK SO. GUESS I'M A BIT AFRAID OF HEIGHTS.
WELL, WHADDAYA THINK? DIDN'T I TAKE YOU TO A NICE PLACE?
IT'S ALL SO PERFECT, MATT!
"UP HERE, THE NOISE OF THE FUN-FAIR IS MUFFLED. THE BREEZE IS LIKE A CARESS...
WHEN I MOVED TO THIS CITY, I NEVER THOUGHT ONE DAY I'D FIND IT SO BEAUTIFUL...
YOU KNOW WHAT? ME EITHER...
...BEFORE YOU CAME HERE!
"AND LOOK! THE FIRST LIGHTS OF EVENING AND THE SUN ABOUT TO SET OVER THE SEA...
"I'M FEELING A HAPPINESS THAT LEAVES ME SPEECHLESS..."
CLUNK

WHAT WAS THAT?
THE WHEEL STOPPED!
WILL...YOU'RE SHIVERING. IT'S THIS SUDDEN COLD WIND...
WHOOSH
NO, MATT... SOMETHING'S HAPPENING. I CAN SENSE IT.
LOOK!
WHAMMSH
AN ICY DARKNESS WIPES AWAY SOUNDS AND COLORS...
...ERASES WHAT WAS MASQUERADING AS REALITY...
THE PEOPLE, WILL... THEY'RE ALL DISAPPEAR-ING!
...AND RETURNS THE FUNFAIR TO A SINISTER, ABANDONED SETTING!
THAT'S CRAZY! I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIK—
WATCH OUT!
CRACK
AAAAH!
MATT! NOOOO!

HELP! HEART OF KANDRAKAR... HELP ME!
SAVE HIM... PLEASE!
WHIIINNN
NOW IT'S YOU AND ME, GUARDIAN. I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT SO LONG, AND YOU'RE MAKING MY JOB EASIER!
SO NAIVE! YOU'RE SO FOCUSED ON HIM YOU DON'T EVEN NOTICE ME!
YOU RISKED YOUR SECRET... AND THE HEART... BECAUSE YOU ONLY HAVE EYES FOR THIS FOOL!

WATCH OUT FOR LOVE, WILL. IT MAKES YOU VULNERABLE—DEFENSELESS...
AYIIIEE!
SHAIZZ
"IT'S NOTHING BUT WEAKNESS AND BLINDNESS...
THUMP
CREEEEK
"...AND ONLY BRINGS PAIN AND DEFEAT!"
WOOOOOSH
WILL!
246
THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR! FINALLY! THE MASTER WILL BE PLEASED, AND I'LL GET A GENEROUS REWARD!
THAT JEWEL...I... I RECOGNIZE IT!
"I REMEMBER THAT GLEAMING GLOBE... AND MY BODY OBEYING SOMEONE ELSE'S ORDERS. AND THEN...THEN..."*
*THAT WAS CHAPTER 20, WHEN NERISSA TOOK OVER MATT'S BODY TO MAKE WILL HAND OVER THE HEART!
...EMPTI-NESS!
THANKS, GUARDIAN. YOU DIDN'T GIVE ME THE HEART OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL, TRUE...

...BUT AFTER ALL, YOU DIDN'T RESIST, RIGHT?
ANYWAY, I DON'T THINK YOU'LL BE ABLE TO RECLAIM IT...
...SINCE YOU WON'T BE AROUND TO REPORT WHAT HAPPENED!
SHAZZZZ
NOOO! WILL!
UNEXPLAINABLE THINGS HAPPEN, THINGS THAT DEFY ALL LOGIC, UPENDING EXPECTATIONS.
CEDRIC'S RAY COULD DESTROY MATT AND WILL INSTANTLY...BUT INSTEAD COLLIDES WITH A BARRIER...
FZZZZZ
...GENERATED BY THE HEART OF KANDRAKAR, SEEMINGLY POWERLESS...BUT AWAKENED BY MATT'S INSTINCTIVE RESPONSE!
URGH!
THE SPELL REBOUNDS ON ITS CREATOR TWICE AS HARD...CATCHING HIM UNPREPARED AND EXPOSED.
AAARGH!
FZZZ

WATCH OUT FOR LOVE, CEDRIC! IT BRINGS OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE...
...HIDES STRENGTH YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD...
YAAAA...
FIZZZ
...AND CAN EVEN AWAKEN MAGIC!
...AAARGH! IT'S NOT OVER!
FZZZZZZF
BECAUSE LOVE IS THE GREATEST MAGIC OF ALL!
WILL...I DON'T THINK I GET MUCH OF WHAT HAPPENED... BUT I DO KNOW ONE THING...

"I WANNA BE THE FIRST THING YOU SEE WHEN YOU OPEN YOUR EYES."
WILL... WELCOME BACK! HOW ARE YOU?
MATT! I...I...
I'M S-SORRY...IT WAS A TRAP! I COULDN'T SEE HIS FACE, BUT...
DON'T WORRY. IT'S ALL OVER.
ARE YOU OKAY? I...THERE'S SO MUCH I'VE GOT TO TELL YOU, MATT. ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED... WHAT YOU SAW...
SHHH. IT DOESN'T MATTER NOW. THERE'LL BE TIME TO EXPLAIN...ALL THE TIME WE WANT.
249
OH, MATT. FORGIVE ME! YOU'RE SHOCKED, I KNOW...I NEVER MEANT...
IT'S ALL RIGHT, WILL. AFTER ALL, I DIDN'T FIND OUT MUCH MORE THAN WHAT I ALREADY KNEW...
I D-DON'T UNDERSTAND...

THAT YOU'RE MAGICAL AND SPECIAL, WILL... I'VE KNOWN SINCE THE FIRST DAY WE MET.
SO... SO YOU THINK THAT DESPITE EVERYTHING WE'VE BEEN THROUGH... WE CAN REALLY START OVER?
START OVER? ABSOLUTELY NOT.
!!
I'D RATHER PICK UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF...

OLSEN AND VANDOM, HUH? I DON'T SEE EITHER OF THEM!
I SWEAR, COURTNEY. HE SAID HE WAS GONNA TAKE HER HERE TONIGHT.
I HEARD IT WITH THESE EARS!
SOON MINE WON'T BE ABLE TO HEAR ANYTHING ANYMORE! LET'S GET OUT OF THIS DUMP!
HEY, PRETTY LADIES! YOU'RE NOT LEAVING, ARE YOU? THE PARTY'S JUST BEGUN!
URGH!
UM... ACTUALLY, WE HAVE A DATE AND...
AND HERE WE ARE! YOU PICKED THE VERY BEST!
EXIT
YOU BET, JEFF! TONIGHT WE'RE BUYING, LADIES!
TH-THANKS, BUT... REALLY...
C'MON, DON'T BE SHY. IT'S BANGING HERE!
WHAT THE HECK IS HE SAYING?
SO, WHAT'RE YOU HAVIN'?
BESS... NOBODY HAS TO KNOW! IF THEY FIND OUT AT THE PAPER, WE'LL LOSE OUR SPOTS!
NO WORRIES, SIS. IF IT'S ABOUT US...FOR ONCE I'LL KEEP MY MOUTH SHUT!
TONITE HEVY METAL PART
LIVE MUSIC
YOU KNOW WHAT, COURTNEY? I THOUGHT OF A TITLE FOR OUR NEW GOSSIP COLUMN...
HOW ABOUT... "THE LAST SECRET"?
THE END

In the wardrobe of...

Taranee's Wardrobe

1. On the top shelf, Tara keeps her favorite books. They're full of fantastical stories about adventures, traveling, and exploring!

2. Next to the books there's her photo album: a collection of the most interesting pics she snapped since she got her first roll of film when she was only seven years old.

3. Cat ring holder: Tara likes to keep her many trinkets always in order.

4. Her mom says a wardrobe is no place to hang photos, but Tara isn't changing her mind. She loves to open the door and see a picture that brings back sweet memories.

5. Her style is unique, colorful, and very personal, like this handbag made of woven natural fibers.

6. This is Taranee's winter coat, super warm and with a pink tiger print pattern.

7 Taranee doesn't feel super comfy in a skirt: She usually prefers trousers. But on special occasions, she makes an exception and wears this dress she bought after an exhausting afternoon shopping with her mom.

8 On spring days, as soon as a little wind comes out, Taranee runs out into the garden with her kite, and it doesn't matter if Peter makes fun of her saying it's a toy for children.

9 She doesn't know why she loves succulents so much: maybe because they're strong and can survive in difficult conditions?

10 This hen is a present from Peter. Apparently, he saw it in a shop window, and it reminded him of Taranee. If he says so…

In the wardrobe of...

Cornelia's Wardrobe

1. A straw hat with satin ribbons and lots of flowers. Corny even wore it at the last carnival!

2. This is the dress she wore for her twelfth birthday party. She likes it because it's elegant but not too serious.

3. Candy handbag. Hay Lin saw one in a shop, but when she went back to buy it, it was gone. So she sewed one herself!

4. A sweater she bought in Redstone. Nice color, but her mom says it shows too much of her belly.

5. Cornelia loves perfume, especially floral scents. Her bottom drawer is full of little bottles. There are also jars full of seashells.

6. Every year, Corny saves the seashells she picks up on the beach. They remind her of summer!

7 Old dolls and teddy bears. Cornelia's secret: She doesn't want to throw them away. When she's feeling sad or can't sleep, she grabs one.

8 They're old and don't fit her anymore, but she'll never throw out her first ice skates.

9 One of the trophies she won. This one has a special meaning because the competition was especially fierce. She never thought she'd take second place.

10 The shawl that belonged to her grandma. It's been passed down from generation to generation. Cornelia wears it when she's feeling insecure.

11 Her latest find: a special dress for a fancy dinner with her dad's colleagues.

12 Heeled shoes. They're gorgeous but so uncomfortable!

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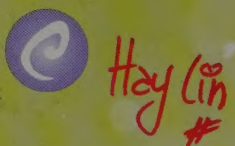
The Oracle Accused!

A shadow moves over Kandrakar, and the Oracle can feel it stirring. When a member of the Congregation questions his recent decisions and his involvement in human affairs, Kandrakar's leader suddenly finds himself on trial! The girls are called to testify, but given their recent treatment by the Oracle, will they stand with him or against him...?



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